

**codeword: crimson**

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by [No\\_one\\_you\\_know](#)

## Summary

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Phil passed him a file labeled ‘Top Secret’. Ranboo opened the file, preparing to flip through pages, but stopped when he saw only one page.

“We’ve been referring to him as ‘Red’,” Phil added, as if that helped at all.

It was a grainy security photo of what looked to be a fancy event, probably a fundraiser dinner or something similar. In the center of the photo was a Caucasian male with sandy blonde hair. He was wearing an ill-fitting suit, the most notable thing about it were the red flowers stuffed into his front pocket.

Or, the Alliumduo secret agent/spy au that literally no one asked for

## Notes

Yo! Quick warning- this story starts off fairly light but gets darker as it goes on. It has themes of gun violence, torture, amnesia, and a few other things like that. You don't have to worry about those right now, but it's something to be aware of as you read. If you don't think you can handle it, that's okay, you're not obligated to read the story.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# prologue

## Chapter Summary

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Someone screams. A woman, he thinks, judging by the tone of her voice. It’s in pain, not fear, and somehow that makes the entire situation worse.

Ranboo shoves his hands over his ears, desperate to muffle the noise but having no success. If anything, the screams are louder now.

Then he hears the gunshot. It’s a mix of a low crack and a tinny reverb. It’s echoing across the walls of the room, over and over, the sound deafening. The sound is loud and overwhelming his senses- all he can focus on is the ‘boom’, despite the fact he knows he should be smelling blood by now. He hears it long after the echoes fade.

The woman has stopped screaming. Ranboo has barely started.

He shot up from the bed, eyes wide, screaming bloody murder. He cut the scream off with a strangled sound, clapping a hand over his mouth in an attempt to not wake anyone up. It was still dark outside, they should be sleeping.

The only sound in the room now was Ranboo’s shaky breaths, so frantic they could count as sobs. He could hear his heart pounding in his chest and the blood rushing in his ears.

There was a quiet knock on his bedroom door. His eyes darted towards the door, and he pressed the hand harder against his mouth.

It was pure muscle memory that made him hold back another sob. He *had* to be quiet, though he wasn't sure why. Something... Something bad would happen if he was loud.

What would happen?

He didn't know. All he knew is that he needed to be quiet or else-

There was a knock on the door once again. It was Technoblade, he realized. No one else knocked quite the same way- because everyone else Ranboo knew used their knuckles to knock on the door, while Technoblade used the back of his hand. It made for a louder, more echoey sound.

Besides, Phil and Technoblade were the only other people in the house, anyway.

Ranboo swallowed the lump in his throat before calling out, "Come in."

Sure enough, it was Technoblade who opened the door. He didn't walk inside, standing halfway through the door frame instead.

Technoblade filled out most of the doorframe, only a few inches from hitting his head on the top. He was so bulked up with muscles that he didn't have much spare room on the sides of the frame, either.

Technoblade wore an old paint-covered shirt and sweatpants. His hair was sticking up in all directions, though it was only a few inches long, so it technically didn't look too much of a mess. His hair was also covered in bleach.

"Is- is it hair-bleaching night?" Ranboo asked before Technoblade could get a word in. He wiped the tears from his eyes quickly.

Technoblade nodded. "Yeah. You're due for another dye job, by the way. Your eyebrow 's turning white."

Ranboo hummed at that, not feeling quite like responding.

Technoblade shifted awkwardly in the doorway. "Should I get Phil?"

"What? No! No," Ranboo said, quickly, panicked, "Phil needs sleep. I don't- I'm okay. I'm fine."

Technoblade blinked. “Look, I’m not good at this feelings stuff, I can go get-”

“Nope. I am a-okay here, man,” Ranboo assured, not convincing anyone.

“Mhm.” He shifted again. “Do you want me to come in?”

If Ranboo was literally anyone else, it would have been a really weird, probably illegal situation. Technoblade was the Deputy Director of the Syndicate- an intelligence agency responsible for nationwide (and occasionally worldwide) threats. Ranboo was an intern in charge of gathering intelligence for the agency, which technically made Technoblade his boss.

To be honest, though, the Syndicate was less of an employer and more of a family to Ranboo. Phil had taken Ranboo in at his lowest, and Technoblade, being Phil’s closest associate, practically became Ranboo’s best friend.

“Sure,” Ranboo muttered. He scooted over on the side of his bed, making room for Technoblade.

Technoblade sat on the bed, the mattress sinking in slightly where he sat. “Another night terror?”

“Nightmare,” Ranboo sighed. “I remember it this time. I- I know I should, but I don’t want to write it down.”

“Then tell it to me.” It was a simple suggestion, though it didn’t exactly solve Ranboo’s problem.

There’s two things someone would need to know about Ranboo to understand him as a person.

Firstly- he was seventeen and a child prodigy. He could solve partial differential equations with ease, and had to have math tutors flown in from across the world throughout high school.

He spoke five languages- English, Mandarin, French, Spanish, and Russian. Not to mention he could read both Japanese and Greek.

He could recall the history of places all over the world, even obscure things that most people had never even heard of.

That history knowledge was ironic, actually. It brings up the second thing one needs to know about Ranboo:

He had retrograde amnesia. Everything before his fifteen birthday was nothing- an empty slot where memories should be but weren't. On good days, it gave him a headache when he tried to think back. On bad days, it gave him consecutive panic attacks for hours at a time.

The only way he ever really recalled things were in dreams, and even then, they were usually fleeting and confusing.

“I was in the room again.”

Technoblade took in a sharp breath at that.

A lot of his dreams occurred in what they had dubbed as ‘the room’. Technoblade said it was probably an interrogation room, but they both knew it was more likely a torture chamber. It was concerning that most of his memories occurred there.

“There was a woman screaming,” Ranboo continued quietly, “And then there was a gunshot.”

Technoblade nodded, urging him to continue.

“She stopped screaming after that. Uh,” He paused, thinking. Puffy always told him to think about why certain details of his dream happened, and he couldn't stop thinking about the echoing. “I think the room was definitely metal. It echoed a lot, and I must not have had ear protection.”

Technoblade nodded again. “Anything else?”

Ranboo sighed. “No, that's it. I woke up after.”

“You were screaming.”

“I- yeah. Sorry about that, I didn't mean-”

“I don't care.” Technoblade shrugged. “Though you did startle me. I thought you were gettin' murdered or something.” He snorted.

Ranboo couldn't help but laugh a little, too.

—!—!—!—

There were two exits to the building. One was at the front of the store- maybe four yards behind him. It wasn't a viable exit, though, not with the six people in line and two more in a nearby booth.

The side door would be a better escape route. It was a little further away, and four people sat nearby, but they seemed too enthralled in conversation to notice much around them. He could run out the door before either saw him.

Of course, there was also the employee's exit. Hidden behind a corner, but still there. He would have to jump the counter to get past it, as well as dodge employees. Not to mention, it could lead to one of those weird hallway things before an actual exit. That said, if someone came in with a gun, that could be his best option, as it would have the most-

"Welcome to the L'manburg Cafe, what can I get you?"

It would have the most distractions for the shooter.

Tommy rolled his eyes as he stepped up to the front counter. "Two muffins and a caramel frapp."

The boy working there can't be much older than Tommy, with messy brown hair falling in his eyes. "What kind of muffins?"

Tommy faltered. "Uh- baked?"

The boy- Tubbo, he realized, looking at the nametag- let out a laugh. "What *flavor* muffin do you want? We have blueberry, orange, chocolate-"

"One chocolate, one blueberry?"

"Got it, bossman." The boy mock-saluted. "Anything else for you?"

"Nah, that's all."

Tubbo slid the card swiper over towards Tommy. "That'll be 11.59."

Tommy nodded. He swiped the card quickly, not caring about the price. It was Dream's company card, anyway, so really, he could spend as much as he liked.

"And can I get a name for the order?"

Tommy thought for a moment then nodded. “Tom.”

Tommy stepped out of the line and into the waiting area, halfway tuning out of nearby conversations as he waited for his coffee. He could hear the next order- something about pumpkin spice. Gross. Pumpkin was arguably the worst flavor anyone could get, especially in coffee. Tommy would prefer it black over that.

Cutting him off from his thoughts, his phone vibrated in his pocket. He pulled it out quickly- there weren't many people who could text him, and none of them liked waiting.

It was Dream, of course. He should have known.

*'Where are you?'* The text read.

Tommy hated texts from Dream. He could never tell if they were angry or worried or teasing. This one probably was the first option, however, as Dream should have known exactly where he was.

Tommy had a tracker, after all. And Dream, his handler, knew where he was at all times. He had no reason to *not* know where Tommy was at the moment.

So, Tommy rolled his eyes and texted back,

*'Coffee'* as if that was a viable location. He didn't look at Dream's next text, stuffing the company phone into the pocket of his pants. It was probably more of the same old “get back right now” stuff Dream always said.

He tapped his foot to the music playing over the radio as he waited. He didn't recognize the song, but he really didn't listen to much music nowadays, especially not the pop music they were playing.

If he listened closely, he could hear one of the workers- not Tubbo, but the one making the coffee- humming along to the song. She must have really liked it, swaying slightly to the beat.



“-It is frankly ridiculous that you won’t honor your own coupon,” A woman was shouting. Tommy turned his head to look, making a profile of her in his head, not that it would really have any use.

She was middle aged, long brown hair pulled into a tight bun on top of her head. Blue eyes. A well-fitting suit, too, so she was probably some kind of professional.

“Ma’am,” Tubbo replied nervously, “The coupon expired six months ago. It’s not-“

“Are you accusing me of having a fake coupon?” She huffed loudly.

“No, but your coupon isn’t valid anymore.”

The woman was seething now. “It says it’s valid. Are you seriously going to deny a paying customer their order?”

Tubbo winced. The poor kid looked incredibly uncomfortable, if not a little nervous. “Your coupon isn’t valid,” he repeated, “Which means I can’t use it.”

“I want to talk to your-“ She began to say, but was interrupted by none other than the big man himself.

Tommy crossed the short distance in between them and tapped her on the shoulder.

“Lady, it’s seven in the morning. Find another coffee shop to scream in, thanks.”

She seemed taken aback, but it was quickly replaced by anger.

Tommy had been through a lot in his life. He had multiple loaded guns aimed at his head, he had been arrested countless times, hell, he had even been tortured on occasion. Still, having an adult direct their anger at him always threw him off a little.

“This is none of your business.” She was probably going to say more, but Tommy cut in.

“Actually, you made it everyone’s business when you started screaming in the middle of a coffee shop.”

She glared daggers at him, so much so that he had to stifle a flinch. Luckily, he was an actor at heart and knew how to hold his ground.

Finally, the woman lowered her voice to a regular volume, though it still shook with anger. “Your parents must be very disappointed in you. You’re a very, very rude young man.”

Tommy snorted. “My parents are dead.”

Somehow, that was her last straw. She let out a loud huff and turned for the door- the main exit, having to push past people in order to get through. Tommy held firm to the idea that the employee exit would be the safest one.

“Have a good day, ma’am!” Tommy shouted after her, sidestepping back to the waiting line.

Tubbo was giggling, burying his head in his hands for a moment, scrunching his fingers into his shaggy brown hair.

He straightened quickly, shooting Tommy a look of gratitude before getting back to taking orders.

Five minutes passed before someone shouted out “Tom”. He was handed a bag that felt a little too heavy, and was about to leave through the side door when someone stopped him.

“Hey, Tom.” It was Tubbo, he realized. “Thanks, by the way. For dealing with that lady.”

Tommy snorted. “Of course, yeah.”

“You seem nice. I hope we’ll cross paths again.”

“Oh,” Tommy frowned at that, “Yeah, maybe. Later, Tubso.” And he rushed out the door.

Tommy knew he made a mistake, ears burning as he speed-walked down the street, holding the bag tightly in one hand.

He was supposed to blend into the crowd. He was supposed to fit in. He was supposed to be *forgettable*. He was definitely not supposed to make connections with the first person he interacted with.

Dream was going to be furious.

Although... It was just one coffee shop worker, wasn’t it? Just one guy who couldn’t be much older than Tommy himself. The chances of them ever crossing paths again were slim to none, even, so it wasn’t like it really mattered.

Still, he found himself rushing a little faster to headquarters, just in case.

By the time he made it through the multiple security checks and up the two separate elevators to Dream's office, he had finished half of his coffee, which was already turning lukewarm.

He walked through the long hallways, past the abandoned receptionist desk of Dream's floor, and made his way to the office door.

Tommy took a deep breath and exhaled through his mouth before knocking once, twice, three times.

Three- maybe four- seconds passed before the door swung open.

"Tommy," Dream snapped, "Where were you?"

Tommy held up his half-empty cup rather gingerly. "Coffee."

Dream rolled his eyes. He grabbed Tommy by the sleeve of his sweater and dragged him inside, closing the door behind him.

Dream was... An interesting guy. Sharp jaw, dirty blonde hair, bluish-green eyes and freckles dusting his nose. He almost always wore a calm smile on his face, though if you focused on it for a while one could begin to see the cracks underneath it. Take now, for instance; Dream's eyes were narrowed slightly in anger.

"Sit," Dream commanded, already taking a seat on his side of the desk. The entire thing was covered in different files and papers, both his computer screens lit up and covered in countless windows. It was a mess.

Tommy sat in the large wooden chair on the opposite side of Dream. He set his bag down on a small empty space on the table.

"You can't just go out by yourself. Especially not without telling us where you're going."

Tommy shrugged. "I left George a note. He was sleeping."

Dream's smile fell. He pinched the bridge of his nose and leaned his head back, mouthing words Tommy could only somewhat read. He was pretty sure it was a prayer.

Slowly, he opened the bag he had gotten from the cafe. "In my defense, it's really boring in here."

"You're a fugitive, Tommy. What if someone saw you?" Dream asked, exasperated.

He pulled out a napkin and set it in front of Dream. "I was careful. No one even paid attention to me," He lied through his teeth.

Dream frowned at the napkin. "The Syndicate wants you dead, Tommy."

Tommy made a face. He set the chocolate muffin on top of the napkin, then pulled out the blueberry one for himself. "Huh, he gave me a cookie, too," Tommy murmured, more to himself than to Dream. "Do you want to split it, or should I just save it for later?"

Dream stared at him for a long moment. He blinked slowly.

A few seconds passed.

And then Dream let out a laugh. Tommy laughed nervously along with him.

"You're stubborn, you know that?" Dream asked, a smile teasing his lips.

Tommy rolled his eyes.

"We have a coffee shop in the building. You didn't have to leave, you know."

"I know, but-"

"Let's see this doesn't happen again, yeah?" The smile was gone.

Tommy nodded, knowing better than to argue at this point.

"Good, in that case, I need to brief you on your next mission."

Dream pushed the chocolate muffin out of his way, moving papers left and right as if trying to organize them, though it all just looked like a mess to Tommy.

“Wait,” Tommy said quickly, holding up his hands, “You said no missions while I was injured.”

Dream raised an eyebrow. “You’re not injured.”

“I was literally shot a week ago!” Tommy protested.

“A bullet grazed your arm, Tommy, that’s not-“

“I had to get ten stitches,” He insisted.

“Do you want the mission or not?”

Tommy made a face.

“Yeah, I want the mission,” He mumbled, avoiding eye-contact.

“That’s what I thought. Now stop acting like a child over everything- this is literally your job.”

Tommy sunk down in his chair a little. He took a bite of his muffin, watching as Dream shuffled through more papers.

He had been working at Dream’s agency for... Two years? Maybe three, depending on what counted as ‘working’ there. Technically he had been part of Dream’s Team for four years now, but the first year and a half had been spent in what Dream liked to refer to as training. Tommy thought ‘conditioning’ described it better, but obviously he wasn’t going to say that to Dream.

It was fine, though. It made Tommy stronger in the end. A better person, too, even if he was just as annoying as he was before. In the end, it made Tommy a better agent.

A better *secret* agent. A spy, if you will. An undercover operative. An intelligencer. A-

Yeah, ‘agent’ was pretty much the only term they used frequently. It was the easiest to say, anyway.

All he tended to do was go undercover, gain people's trust, and then steal information from them. It was a pretty good job, especially considering he not only got paid for it, but was supplied food and housing.

Even if it was a little dangerous at some points- thus the current bullet wound- Tommy still enjoyed it. There was a rush that came with pretending to be something he wasn't, almost like an actor on stage.

Besides, even on days that he hated it, it wasn't like he had another option.

"Ah, here it is." Dream held out a folder towards Tommy, who took it and tentatively opened it.

"So... What's the mission, exactly?"

"Someone's been trying to get our data. How they've managed to get through all of our security, I'm not entirely sure, but it doesn't matter- everything's encrypted, anyway."

Tommy tapped his fingers on the outside of the folder and took another bite of his muffin. Through a mouthful, he asked, "If it doesn't matter, why do you need me?"

Dream gave him a look. "We want to know *why* they're trying to get in."

Tommy rolled his eyes. "It's the government wanting your info, probably."

Dream sighed. He pulled the folder out of Tommy's hands, then opened it, facing it towards Tommy so he could see the papers inside.

It wasn't like he could see every page, but the first was enough. It was a school ID photo, along with a name, date of birth, home address, and a bunch of other personal information. Tommy froze, eyes darting between the photo and Dream.

Usually he wouldn't care about who his targets were, but this was different.

The guy in the photo had fluffy brown hair, and though it was a little shorter than Tommy remembered, Tommy still recognized him. Of course he did, this was the guy in the coffee shop. This was-

"Tubbo Underwood," Dream explained, tapping at the name in the file, "Is a seventeen year-old university student. He's gifted when it comes to computers, but he shouldn't be gifted

enough to hack into things like this. He works at some coffee shop, not for the government, which is just another reason why we need to know why he's doing what he's doing."

Tommy swallowed. "Okay. And I'm supposed to find that out... How?"

Dream let out a sigh like it was supposed to be obvious. Maybe it was, actually. "You're going to befriend him and get him to tell you. Go undercover at his school if you have to, I don't care."

Tommy paused, eyebrows furrowed. "I'm eighteen, though."

"You're—" Dream stopped, considering.

Tommy stared at him for a moment, narrowing his eyes just a smidge as if daring Dream to finish that sentence. He didn't, of course, quickly brushing it off instead.

"You are, but you can easily pass for a sixteen year-old. Maybe even fourteen."

"I do *not* pass for fourteen!" Tommy shouted, snatching the file from Dream's hand and rifling through the papers.

"You do. Anyway, it'll be easier if you can do this without school, but we can make some records if needed."

Tommy thought back to his conversation with Tubbo earlier. Then, to the cookie in the bag.

He took another bite out of his muffin. "It should—"

"Don't talk with your mouth full." Dream said, voice dipping into angry territory. He wasn't quite mad, but pretty close to the line.

Tommy knew better than to cross that line. He swallowed before continuing. "It should be fine. He... Looks polite. I can be his friend easily."

Dream hummed.

Tommy flipped through the papers, eyes skimming over the information. It was all basic things- health records (nothing more than checkups and a previously broken arm), school reports (he was an almost straight-A student), criminal records (several accounts, the most recent for vandalism), and a few other basic things.

Apparently he had gone to regionals for... Trampolining. Whatever that was. He also was president of his school's robotics club and had won several awards for it.

Tubbo was talented, Tommy would give him that. But he wouldn't take him for someone who'd hack into an agency like Dream's, especially with the reputation the place upheld.

There were rumors everywhere that the SMP did some... Less than legal things to ensure their secrets were kept secret. Tommy shivered just at the thought.

The SMP should be intimidating to an outsider. Scary, even. People shouldn't want to mess with them, especially not when 'people' was a seventeen year old boy.

"I'll need a persona," Tommy said, after a long minute of reading through documents.

Dream raised an eyebrow. "An identity, Tommy."

"Yeah, that. And they need to be named Tom."

"And why is that?"

Tommy shot a glance at the bag still sitting on the desk. "Because he served me coffee this morning and that's what I told him my name was."

Dream's expression morphed somewhere between exasperation, anger, and an aneurysm. That was Tommy's sign to get out.

He stood, taking one last bite of his muffin before tossing the wrapper into the trash. "Well, Dream, it was great seeing you."

"Tommy," Dream started.

He tucked the folder under his arm and took a few short strides to the door. "I've got a lot to read up on-" he tapped the folder twice, "So I'll see you later."

Dream pushed his chair back and stood. "Tommy-"

"Bye, Dream!" Tommy slammed the door behind him before taking off down the nearest hallway. He promptly ignored Dream's shouts for him to come back.



## **name: unknown**

### Chapter Summary

He turned his attention to the folder as Phil left.

There... Really wasn't much information at all. The blurry picture proved he was blonde, but for all Ranboo knew, it was dyed, or, better yet, a wig. He could barely tell the person had eyes, much less a face, so he read the words that came with the image instead.

The stack of folders piled on his desk were reaching far too high for his liking. It was several inches thick at this point and only grew higher as time passed.

Ranboo was supposed to be putting the information onto their online system, then filing all of the papers away. Instead, he was blasting Lemon Demon on his headphones and re-organizing the reports for the third time this hour.

It wasn't that Ranboo didn't like his job. He really did. Not to mention, Technoblade and Director- er, *Phil* had practically saved his life. It was just...

"Are you bored, mate?" Phil asked, pulling up a spare chair to Ranboo's desk.

Ranboo quickly jerked the earbuds out of his ears. "What? No! No, no, I was just... Organizing. The papers. Yeah."

Phil snorted. "Sure you were, Ranboo."

"I was! They just- I needed to reorganize them."

Phil gave him a smile.

Phil was Ranboo's... Foster father. Sort of. When Ranboo had first been found, barely fourteen years-old, Phil was the first to volunteer to take him in. At the time, it was the safest option for him. The goal was for him to move into official foster care within a few months, but when the time came, Ranboo didn't want to leave, and Phil didn't want him to, either.

Phil was a nice man. A little short, standing at around 5'10 on a good day. Though maybe that was average, but Ranboo and Technoblade were both over 6'0 and easily dwarfed him in height.

Phil had blonde hair falling somewhere between chin and shoulder length, usually pulled back into a short ponytail, showing off his face better.

He had green eyes, just a few shades less vibrant than the emerald stud earrings that he donned nearly every day. It went well with the green sweater he was currently wearing. Ranboo wondered if he was trying to go for a theme today.

“Relax, Ranboo, I’m just messing with you.”

Ranboo gave him an awkward smile.

“On a more serious note, I was thinking we could pass all this stuff-“ he gestured to the stack of papers, “-off to a different intern. I have a new job for you.”

Oh, thank heavens. Ranboo was going to lose it if he actually had to file all those.

“Okay..?” Ranboo replied, raising an eyebrow.

“We need you to look into a person. See if you can work some magic or something, because we really have next-to-no information.”

Ranboo paused before nodding slowly. “I’ll see what I can do. What info do you have?”

Phil passed him a file labeled ‘Top Secret’. Ranboo opened the file, preparing to flip through pages, but stopped when he saw only one page.

“We’ve been referring to him as ‘Red’,” Phil added, as if that helped at all.

It was a grainy security photo of what looked to be a fancy event, probably a fundraiser dinner or something similar. In the center of the photo was a Caucasian male with sandy blonde hair. He was wearing an ill-fitting suit, the most notable thing about it were the red flowers stuffed into his front pocket.

The photo was caught in the middle of movement, meaning that his face (which was already somewhat hidden from the camera) was blurred beyond comprehension.

“Why are you trying to find him?” Ranboo asked, examining the photo for any other defining traits- or at least a location.

“We think he knows something about The Crimson.”

Ranboo coughed suddenly in surprise, eyes widening in panic. Once he finally gained control of his breath, he spoke. “He *what?*“

“There have been reports- unconfirmed, but still reports- that he works for the SMP.”

He could hear a pin drop in the silence that followed that.

The SMP wasn't Bad. Necessarily. Just another government-funded security provision. The Service of Mayhem Prevention was what they called themselves. It sounded a little stupid and lighthearted, but Ranboo knew better.

They were known to be forceful with their prisoners. Not murder them, but something worse. There had been rumors that the SMP was in charge of the Crimson, which was another can of worms entirely.

“I'll find what I can, Phil,” Ranboo said, after a moment.

“That's all I'm asking, mate.”

Ranboo nodded. “Cool. Cool, cool,” he murmured, going back to staring at the folder.

“Don't work yourself too hard.” Phil ruffled his hair.

“You too, old man,” Ranboo teased.

“I- okay,” Phil sputtered out, not sure whether to laugh or be offended. “Let me know what you find, yeah?” Phil stood, nodding to Ranboo.

“Yeah, yeah, of course.”

“Good. I have to get to a meeting, but we'll talk later.”

“Mhm. Later, Phil.”

He turned his attention to the folder as Phil left.

There... Really wasn't much information at all. The blurry picture proved he was blonde, but for all Ranboo knew, it was dyed, or, better yet, a wig. He could barely tell the person had eyes, much less a face, so he read the words that came with the image instead.

**Name: Unknown**

**Aliases: Unknown**

**Referred to as: "Red"**

**Age: Young Adult (approximated)**

**Hair: Blonde**

**Eyes: Unknown**

**Gender: Male (presumed)**

**Height: 6'0+ (approximated)**

**Weight: Unknown**

**Agency: unknown, presumed SMP**

**Locations Sighted: Red Banquet Hall**

**Allies: Dream**

**Enemies: Unknown**

Ranboo frowned. This wasn't half as much information as he was hoping for. He wasn't a miracle worker, after all. Just some broke high school student who had a few skills.

**Additional Information: Red displays several behaviors exhibited by Crimson Survivors. Keep a close eye on him**

Okay, so he was looking for a blonde young adult who was slightly taller than average, who may or may not work at the SMP. Great. Yeah, perfect. Ranboo could absolutely do that with no difficulty at all.

He groaned, booting up his computer to do some research.

He was going to find Red, of course. If not for Phil, then for himself. They both had rather personal reasons for wanting to find out more about the Crimson, anyway, and so far, Red was their biggest (and only) lead.

He started by going to the SMP's semi-public database and looking through their employees. He pulled out every blonde young-adult male intern, only finding about five or so. Next were their intelligence officers- only two there. There were twenty agents, one higher up, and then, of course, Dream himself.

Ranboo scratched Dream off of the list. The man was not only the director of the SMP, but he certainly wasn't a young adult anymore, no offense to the guy.

By the time he was finished combing through their entire list, about three hours had passed, and he only had about forty people on the list. Some of them didn't quite match the description, but he didn't want to rule them out just yet, either.

He decided he could organize them next. Maybe not in alphabetical order, but by the likeliness of being Red? Or-

Ranboo's phone, which he had forgotten had been sitting on his desk the entire time, lit up with a notification.

*Tubbo: call?*

He glanced at the time at the top of the screen.

4:00.

He was supposed to go home an hour ago. Phil would be (not upset, but) annoyed at him for staying overtime like this. He was supposed to not work so many hours, not only because of his past, but because he needed time to work on schoolwork.

And time to call Tubbo, apparently, who he had definitely agreed to call at 4:00, but was now going to have to push back.

He hit the save button on his computer, then shut it down. He grabbed his phone and sent Tubbo a quick message back.

*Ranboo: Sorry, got held up at work. If I can catch a ride, I'll call you at 4:30*

*Tubbo: OK bossman*

Great. Easy. No big problem. He would just have to see if... If someone was getting off work soon. Speaking of, Technoblade had walked into the room, giving Ranboo the chance to ask him. He stuffed his phone in his pocket, slung his backpack over his shoulder, and stood.

“Techno,” He called, waving his hand to get Techno’s attention above the rest of the busy office.

Although the Syndicate wasn’t huge, Ranboo still shared a room with several other people, though none of them paid him much mind.

Technoblade glanced at him, giving him a confused look.

“Can I get a ride with you?”

“Shouldn’t you have left hours ago?” Technoblade drawled.

“I- uh-” He tried to think of an excuse, but came up with none. “Yeah...” He admitted, slightly quieter than before. He still made his way over to Techno, so they weren’t shouting this conversation in front of everybody.

Technoblade stared at him for a moment, then started walking. “Come on, then. I won’t tell Phil if you don’t.”

Ranboo grinned, increasing his pace to keep up with the man.

They got home in record time- Ranboo managed to walk through the doors of their townhouse at 4:15, even though it was supposed to be a 25 minute-long drive home, 40 by bus. Wow, was he relieved he didn't have to take the bus home.

It was a good house. A little lower-class than Phil could probably afford, but Ranboo felt more comfortable with it, anyway.

The outside was painted blue and white with exposed bricks, and though there wasn't a front yard, Techno's garden in the backyard made up for it.

Ranboo wasn't going to the garden now, though. Instead he pulled off his sneakers, dropped his bag by the door, and raced up the stairs until he made it to his third-story bedroom. Yeah, third-story. The house was thin, but it was also incredibly tall. Sort of like Ranboo, actually.

Ranboo shut the door behind him, flopping onto his bed just as the clock hit 4:30. His phone started vibrating immediately, though instead of it only going twice for a text, it kept vibrating over and over. Tubbo was finally calling him.

He answered the call.

"Hey, Tubbo."

"*Ranboo!*" Tubbo's voice crackled through the other end, excitement shining through.

"What's up, man?"

"*Oh, you know, not much.*" there was the muffled sound of shuffling in the background.  
"*Giving out free cookies at work, all that stuff.*"

Ranboo raised an eyebrow. "You're giving out cookies to kids again?"

"*Nah, the guy looked fifteen. I don't even think he noticed I put it in his bag.*" Tubbo giggled mischievously.

Ranboo snorted. "Why'd you give him a free cookie, then?"

Tubbo hummed softly. "*He got some rude lady to leave the store. I had to reward him somehow.*"

He couldn't help but laugh at that. "You had to reward him?" He repeated Tubbo's words, amused.

*“Mhm!”* Tubbo agreed happily. *“Now, tell me why you had to stay so late at work.”*

Ranboo let out an exaggerated sigh, rolling over onto his back to stare at the ceiling.

*“Oh, let me guess, it’s another top secret thing?”* Tubbo teased.

Tubbo didn’t know a lot about Ranboo’s job. He knew that Ranboo worked for Phil. He knew that Phil was the director of the Syndicate (unfortunately that was common knowledge for anyone interested in their line of work).

However, he didn’t know that Ranboo gathered intelligence. As far as Tubbo was aware, Ranboo was just a glorified coffee-fetcher who just wasn’t allowed to say anything about his job.

Ranboo rolled his eyes. *“It’s- well, yeah, but no. Phil set me up on a project and I… I have a lot of work cut out for me, is all.”*

He could picture the face Tubbo was making- a faux-annoyed expression, scrunching up his nose. *“Lots of coffee to get, big man?”*

It was a risk telling Tubbo anything, but he trusted his friend. They had known each other since Ranboo first moved in with Phil. They went to school together. Tubbo had helped him through countless breakdowns throughout the years. Surely Ranboo could trust him with the tiniest amount of information.

*“Phil wants me to research someone that we have no information on,”* he blurted out.

Tubbo was quiet for a moment. *“How much information is ‘no information’?”*

*“I have four details, all of which could be outdated or incorrect.”*

*“That sucks.”*

Ranboo smiled. *“Yeah, it does. But-”* He pushed himself up to a sitting position on one elbow, the other holding his phone. *“Doesn’t matter right now. Want to play video games?”*

*“I thought you’d never ask,”* Tubbo quipped, *“I’m already on CSGO, I’ve been waiting for you to load it up this entire time.”*



He rolled his eyes for what felt like the hundredth time. “Alright, alright, let me grab my laptop.”

They played a few rounds of CSGO, quickly getting bored and switching back and forth between a few other games. It was rather sporadic, but Ranboo wasn’t too into the game, either. He kept thinking about his task at work.

Red might know about the Crimson. If Red knew about the Crimson, he wanted to find the guy as soon as possible. He would just have to narrow a few things down. He was sure someone had to have an account of a conversation with Red somewhere, and from there, they could determine nationality and hometown, which would narrow down his search pool exponentially.

Yeah, tomorrow he would talk to some eye-witnesses. It would be good, and then, he could-

He could hear the sound of the door opening downstairs. A quiet shouted greeting from Phil as he made it home. Was it really seven o’clock already? Ranboo didn’t think he had been on the phone for that long, but apparently he had.

“Dinner!” Phil shouted, voice echoing slightly against the walls.

Ranboo muted himself on his phone before shouting back. “I’ll be down in a minute!” Then, he unmuted to talk to Tubbo, “Phil and Techno are home with dinner, I’ll call you back later?”

*“Sounds good, bossman. I’ll just be here, winning CSGO.”*

Ranboo made a face. “You will not. You need to eat, too.”

*“I’ll just heat up pizza or something when I get hungry,”* Tubbo argued.

“That’s- no. You can come eat with us, if you want. I’m sure Phil won’t mind.”

*“Hmm, what are you having?”*

“I think Phil said Chinese food earlier.”

Tubbo fake gagged. *“Pass.”*

“You *like* Chinese food!” Ranboo groaned.

*“Yeah, but when Phil says Chinese, he means Panda Express. I still can’t convince him to try real Chinese food. Look, have fun at dinner, I’ll call you tomorrow.”*

Ranboo hummed in agreement. “Later, ‘Bo.’”

Tubbo hummed right back. “Later, ‘Boo.’”

The noise over Ranboo’s speakers cut out suddenly as Tubbo hung up the phone call. He lay there for a long moment in the silence before finally getting up and going downstairs.

Tubbo was right, Phil had meant Panda Express. In all honesty, Ranboo didn’t mind, even if he was getting sick of takeout.

Phil was a half-decent cook, he was just rarely home early enough to make dinner. Technoblade was in a similar boat. Speaking of...

“Where’s Techno?” Ranboo asked, looking at Phil across the kitchen table.

“Still at work. Trying to organize a civil meeting between the Syndicate and SMP.”

Ranboo nodded, taking a bite of his food and swallowing before he responded. “And how’s that going?”

“Awful.”

He sighed. “I’m not surprised.”

Phil shrugged at that. “They’re... Not the most agreeable. Though they’re not a group we usually directly connect with, anyway.”

A beat.

“It’s unimportant though,” Phil waved him off, “How’s your research coming?”

Ranboo groaned. “Awful,” He said, parroting Phil’s words from earlier. “Turns out, there’s a lot of blonde young adults working for the SMP.”

“I’m not surprised. Anything you can do to narrow it down?”

“I’m talking to eye-witnesses tomorrow and seeing if they can tell me anything. Even knowing his accent could help,” he explained.

Phil nodded. “Makes sense. You should talk to Techno, he could probably get you in contact with some people.”

“Sure, Phil, I’ll ask him about it.”

They didn’t talk much after that. Not about work, not about school, just... Silence, mostly. The awful sound of chewing mixed with the whirr of the AC that didn’t need to be on and the ticking of the clock in the living room.

It was clear that Phil had something on his mind, but Ranboo wasn’t quite ready to ask him what he was thinking of. Besides, he already vaguely knew what it was about.

An anniversary was coming up. Ranboo wasn’t sure what it was. There was a good chance that Phil or Techno had told him before and he had just forgotten. Letting some things slip his mind seemed to be a side-effect of his... Condition.

He wasn’t going to ask, though. Not when this specific anniversary always turned Phil’s mood sour, somewhere on the line of exhaustion and depression, though never quite going all the way into it.

Ranboo never quite knew how to react when Phil was in a mood like that. In the morning, he would make tea for Phil. Maybe he’d even make cinnamon rolls and give him breakfast in bed if he woke up early enough.

Ranboo zoned back in right as Phil pushed his chair out from the table and stood.

“I’m going to bed. Goodnight, mate,” Phil murmured, already walking away.

A glance at the clock confirmed it was only eight. On a normal day, he’d tease Phil for retiring so early. “Goodnight, Phil.”

Yeah, he would definitely make Phil breakfast in bed, as well as convince Techno to urge him to take the day off. He needed it, anyway. Everyone knew Phil worked himself to death on a good day, anyway.

# coat closet

## Chapter Summary

“My transcripts haven’t been accepted yet, but my foster dad’s working on it,” He waved it off. “What school do you go to?” Tommy already knew the answer, but he was building rapport. Tommy didn’t even know what rapport was, but Dream said it was important, so here he was.

“The Brighton School of Science and Technology. Real nerd school.”

Tommy smiled. “Are you a nerd, then?”

Tubbo smiled right back. “A bit, yeah. I’m really into coding and stuff. Have you ever heard of a Hackathon?”

“A what?”

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The routine went like this:

Tommy woke up, messed around for most of the day (since Tubbo mostly worked evenings instead of mornings), and then he went to the L’manburg Cafe to get coffee.

At the cafe, he would always order a Frappuccino and a blueberry muffin.

It took three days before Tubbo realized- or at least mentioned- that Tommy was becoming a bit of a regular.

“You know, I’ve never seen you before, and now you’re here, like, every night,” Tubbo commented as he brewed the coffee.

It was slow, as most coffee shops were at six in the evening, especially since they were closing in an hour. Really the only people in the building were Tommy and Tubbo, not that Tommy was complaining. It gave him a chance to sit down and talk, as he didn't have any plans or meetings after this.

"Yeah, I'm new here," He said with a shrug. It was a complete lie- Tommy had lived in the area for three years now; he had just never been to that specific coffee shop before. "Just moved in a week ago."

Tubbo hummed at that. "Where'd you move from?"

"Brighton." The lie came easily. He had spent a lot of time in Brighton when he was younger, so it wasn't like he didn't know the place. Sure, he hadn't been there in a few years, but that was no matter. He had done his research and knew that Tubbo lived in the same house his entire life.

Still, Tubbo's face lit up at the mention of Brighton. "I have family down there. You don't happen to know anyone with the last name Nihachu, do you?"

"Can't say that I have, but it's a pretty big city, you know."

"Sure, but it's a small world, you know?" He had just finished putting whipped cream over the drink and now drizzled caramel over the entire thing.

Tommy shrugged once again. "I guess so."

Once he was handed the drink, he took a big gulp of it. He had already been sitting at a bar chair he had pulled up to the front counter- something he normally wouldn't do, but since no one else was there, he didn't really mind.

"Is it nice in Brighton? I only visit every once in a while." Tubbo asked, leaning over the counter, something *he* normally wouldn't do if not for the lack of customers.

"I didn't live on the best side of it, but I think it was nice," He replied, taking a sip of his drink, "It's nice, though. Lots of good people if you ignore all the tourists."

"Why'd you move, then?"

Bingo. The perfect question that Tommy had the perfect answer to.

He wasn't stupid, and he wasn't coming up with answers on the spot. Tommy had spent a good two days coming up with his character- which may not sound like a lot of time, but it was plenty for the master spy that was Tommy Innet himself.

"Well..." He frowned, glancing down at his shoes, rightfully conveying his nervousness. He stirred the straw around in his drink for a few seconds before looking back up and responding. "I'm a foster kid. I had been at this home for, like, two years, and then they decided they didn't want me anymore."

Tubbo bit his lip, frowning just slightly.

Tommy hadn't laid the sadness on too thick, had he? He just wanted pity (ironic, really, because he hated pity), but he could have gone too far and made Tubbo feel awkward. Maybe-

"That sucks, man."

Oh, thank goodness. A casual answer, that was just what he was hoping for.

"My best friend's a foster kid, too," Tubbo continued, trying to lighten the mood. "I think you'd like him a lot."

Ha! Another win for the marvelous spy of Tommy Innet. Meeting Tubbo's friends? He was practically becoming his friend himself. "Yeah?"

"Yeah! His name's Ranboo. Really tall guy, helps tutor at my school." Tubbo paused, then, "Shouldn't you go to school?"

"My transcripts haven't been accepted yet, but my foster dad's working on it," He waved it off. "What school do you go to?" Tommy already knew the answer, but he was building rapport. Tommy didn't even know what rapport was, but Dream said it was important, so here he was.

"The Brighton School of Science and Technology. Real nerd school."

Tommy smiled. "Are you a nerd, then?"

Tubbo smiled right back. "A bit, yeah. I'm really into coding and stuff. Have you ever heard of a Hackathon?"

“A what?”

“A Hackaton,” Tubbo explained excitedly, “Basically a bunch of programmers get together in groups and compete to code software. It’s- it’s really cool, actually.”

Tommy pulled a joking disappointed face. “No actual hacking, then?”

“Nah, not at the Hackathon.”

Dang, Tommy had really thought he had found a lead there.

“Eh, it’s still cool anyway,” He assured.

Tubbo proceeded to rant about the Hackathon until another customer came in, interrupting the flow of their conversation. Tommy excused himself pretty quickly after that, promising to come in the day after.

Days five, six, and seven were all more of the same. Day eight was when things changed- and surprisingly, it wasn’t caused by Tubbo.

Tommy had woken up at six AM that morning. Personally, he felt like that was much too early, but Dream had assured him that most ‘respectable people’ woke at that time, if not earlier, so there he was.

He sat up in bed, pushed his hair out of his face, then rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Then his whole body twitched.

The full-body twitch thing wasn’t new. It wasn’t rare for him to have sudden muscle spasms like that, but this time, it wasn’t a random, out of the blue thing. No, this time, it was because there was someone else in the room with him.

Tommy’s room was small, set up more like a university dorm than a bedroom. His bed was pushed off into the far right corner, right underneath the window. A dresser was to the right of his bed, currently stuffed with unfolded clothes, the top covered in toys and trinkets he had collected over the past months. A desk had been placed opposite his bed, his chair pushed in for now.

On the other side of his room, maybe three feet from the end of his bed and right next to his desk, was a door. Tommy had closed it last night, but that didn't matter. It wasn't like he had a lock.

Someone was standing next to the door, arms folded. Tommy could see flashes of them when he rubbed his eyes, but he couldn't see who it was.

He let out an exaggerated yawn, stretching his arms up over his head, trying to really sell the whole just-woke-up schtick.

In a flash, he moved his arm from the stretching position down to his dresser, picking up the first thing his hand touched- a book George had given him. Without hesitation, he chucked it straight at the person's head.

The person caught it easily, going so far as to sigh in annoyance.

"You flinched when you saw me," Dream noted. He crossed his arms, book still in hand.

Tommy glared at him, pushing the blankets off of his legs. "Dunno how you expected me to react to you *watching me sleep*."

"You should always be on guard, Tommy. I thought you were a good little spy," He said, voice mocking.

Tommy grumbled something under his breath.

"I have a mission for you today," Dream said, ignoring him completely. He uncrossed his arms and began to examine the title of the book instead.

"I already have a mission," Tommy reminded Dream. He stood up, a little shaky first thing in the morning. "I'm investigating Tubbo, remember?"

"Does that take you all day?"

Tommy bit back an insult, instead going for a reasonable answer. "I wouldn't want to accidentally break character."

"Ah, right, because Tom Simmons is so different from Tommy Innet." Dream's voice dripped with sarcasm like honey from a beehive.

Tommy wasn't actually sure if beehives dripped honey. He hadn't been to school in a while. He... Really should talk to Dream about that, actually. Even if he was eighteen, he definitely



didn't have all the schooling an eighteen year-old ought to have.

"What's the mission, then?"

"Nothing big, I promise. I just want you to pick up a harddrive from Las Nevadas."

Tommy made a face. "Doesn't Las Nevadas hate you?"

"Temporary truce. You'll be fine." Dream spoke to him like a parent assuring a child of something very obvious. He hated it.

"I don't want to get shot again, Dream," Tommy practically whined.

"And you won't. Now get dressed and head out there. Wear a jacket, it's cold out."

Tommy made a face again. "Okay, *mom*."

Dream's expression darkened.

"*Sir*," Tommy corrected himself quickly. "Yes, sir."

"I expect you to be on your way in ten minutes. George can drive you." And with that, Dream walked out.

Tommy would realize later that Dream had taken the book with him, but he could ask for it back some other time. Now, he was rushing to get dressed, shoving on his shoes and tossing on a clean grey t-shirt. It probably wouldn't be warm enough, but he was in a bit of a rush, so it didn't quite matter.

The drive to Las Nevadas was short and uncomfortable. Neither spoke a word- though that was mostly because George was focused on the road. It wasn't a difficult drive, but Tommy couldn't blame him, either. After all, it wasn't like Tommy knew how to drive.

...

He had driven a car once, back when he was eight or so. His older-

Okay, stop that train of thought. They were at Las Nevadas now.

Las Nevadas was strange, to be honest. It was an organization, a gang's territory, and a casino. For all intents and purposes, when someone 'went to Las Nevadas', it meant that they

were going to the casino.

The Las Nevadas casino was actually pretty nice. Tommy felt really cool every time he stepped through the doors.

Of course, the first thing that happened was his senses being overwhelmed by smoke. He stepped further inside, crossing the strangely-patterned carpet as he waved the smoke away from his face. Why Quackity allowed people to smoke cigarettes inside, he would never know. He thought it was disgusting.

Although he-

Focus.

The plan was to wander around for a bit, maybe snag a drink, if he was lucky, and find Quackity. The man was usually working the floor in some capacity, wearing the signature suspenders-over-a-button-up outfit that Tommy thought made him look goofy.

The plan failed almost immediately. He had just crossed in between two slot machines when someone- a large security guard- grabbed his arm.

Tommy took a sharp breath of air before plastering on a large, fake smile.

“Hi, Sir. Is something wrong?”

“We don’t allow children in the casino. Sorry, kid.”

He forced a laugh. “It’s fine, I get that all the time. I’m eighteen, actually. If you let go, I can-” The guy let go, “-show you my card.”

Tommy reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. After a moment of shuffling through cards, he managed to get his ID out. He flipped it over and showed it to the man, who all but ripped it out of Tommy’s hand.

“That feels a little aggressive,” Tommy muttered to himself.

“Tommy Innet?” The man asked, scrutinizing him.

“That’s me,”

The man looked him up and down before handing the card back. “Come with me.”

Ah, okay. Quackity must have told the guy Tommy was coming. It wasn’t the first time he had come down to pick up harddrives or other things, so it made sense that Quackity wouldn’t feel obliged to get Tommy himself. The security guard must be escorting him somewhere.

He was led further into the casino, through an employees only door, and then even further down a hallway. Halfway through, the security guard stopped suddenly.

“You can’t bring outside belongings past here. I’ll get you a box to put your things in.”

And who was Tommy to refuse? Shortly after, his phone, wallet, and pocket knife were all dropped into a clear plastic box. He was told that he’d get in major trouble if they found he had any more weapons, so he begrudgingly handed over his second knife.

Then, he was led down the hallway, to the left, and down a set of stairs.

This must have been where Quackity’s office was.

...

This was not where Quackity’s office was.

He realized *that* when the guy shoved him into a small, dingy room. It was maybe a storage room or a coat closet, too small to be used for anything. All that was inside was a singular plastic folding chair.

Well, Tommy was inside, too, he guessed.

“Hang on, what-”

He began to ask, but the door was already slammed in his face. He swore under his breath, rushing forward to open it, but it was already too late- the lock had clicked into place.

Tommy took a deep breath- in through the nose, out through the mouth. He repeated the breath several times before looking around the room.

It was underground- it had to be. No windows to speak of. The floor was cement, stained slightly from the years of use and covered in a thin layer of dust. The walls felt pretty sturdy, too, not that he was planning on breaking through it.

He's in the room again. The metal table is in front of him, he's stuck in a chair and-

No, no, he's not. He was in the basement of the Las Nevadas casino. There was no metal table in sight.

He's going to die.

He wasn't going to die. Tommy Innet was a big man and an even bigger spy, he would be fine, even if he was locked in a small room.

Yeah, locked. It wasn't even that Tommy didn't know how to pick locks- he did, and he was rather good at it. Hell, he even had bobby pins in his hair for that specific purpose, but of course, the lock was electronic, and he would have no way to break it unless he could cause some powerful electric shock to it.

He glanced around the room. There wasn't even a power outlet in here.

Tommy wasn't sure how long he waited. Minutes, hours, days, but he finally leaned back against the wall furthest from the door and sunk down to the ground, laying his head on his knees.

This was fine. Dream knew where he was. Dream wouldn't send him into a situation he couldn't handle. He would be okay. He would be-

He was hyperventilating. He couldn't *breathe* and he hated it in this stupid, tiny room.

The door handle jiggled. He whipped his head up, just in time for Quackity to open the door wide and walk inside.

"What-" Tommy began to ask, but was immediately cut off.

"Where is he?" Quackity practically growled.

Tommy blinked, looking up at him. "Where- what?"

Quackity took a sharp breath, straightening his dress shirt slightly before continuing. "We both know who I'm talking about. I don't want to hurt you, I just want him back."

Tommy slowly climbed to his feet, slouching slightly to not tower over Quackity so much.

Quackity wasn't a short guy, Tommy was just 6'1 (or 6'3, if you asked him). What Quackity lacked in height, he made up for in intimidation. Slightly tanned skin, thick black hair stuffed underneath a beanie that somehow didn't detract from his professionalism, and brown eyes. Er, eye.

Quackity had a thick scar going from just underneath the right side of his lip all the way up to his right eyebrow- straight through his eye. The scar, still somewhat healing, looked scary enough. The fact that the glass eye he wore currently looked like a magic 8 ball only added to the whole thing.

"I don't-" Tommy began to deny, but was once again cut off.

"Take a seat, Thomas." Quackity was the only person to call him that, but it almost felt endearing in a weird way.

It would be more endearing if Quackity didn't have a gun holstered on his hip as well as a thin knife in his left hand.

Tommy sat, shifting uncomfortably in the chair. “I think you might have me confused-”

“I know the SMP is behind it.”

“Behind... What?” Tommy asked, genuinely confused.

“Purpled.”

Oh, yikes.

Purpled was the youngest member of Las Nevadas, around seventeen years old. He was also tall and blonde, like Tommy, though he had an American accent instead of Tommy’s proper British one. Purpled was... Some kind of mercenary, Tommy thought.

He wasn’t a bad kid. A little standoffish, sure, but overall he was someone Tommy could talk to while the adults did their business.

“What happened to Purpled?” Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow.

Quackity glowered at him. “The SMP kidnapped him. And you’re going to tell us where he is, or else.”

“Big Q,” Tommy started, raising his hands as if to show he was unarmed, “I don’t know what you’re-”

A fist collided with Tommy’s face, the loud crack ringing out against the walls. Or, maybe it was just ringing in Tommy’s ears, he wasn’t sure.

“I don’t care if telling us goes against your ‘code’ or whatever, but I promise to do a little worse than that little punch if you keep denying things.”

Tommy took a deep breath and exhaled as a sigh. He thought Quackity was nice- and he was, but Tommy guessed that niceness only went so far.

“So, Thomas, are you going to tell me where you’re keeping Purpled or not?” Quackity’s hand drifted to his knife.

This was going to be a long day.

Tommy watched him, feigning disinterest. "I haven't heard anything about him. Ask Dream."

"You're a good kid, you know." He squatted down, now eye-level with Tommy, who hadn't gotten out of his seat.

"Thanks, I get that a lot." He shifted again, uncomfortable under Quackity's gaze.

"This is your last chance. Come clean now, and I won't have to hurt you."

"Quackity..." Tommy said, looking straight into the man's eyes. The glass eye glinted horribly in the fluorescent light. "I told you, I don't know anything."

Quackity closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again. His expression darkened. "I was really hoping you wouldn't say that."

Quackity jerked the knife forward, most likely aiming for Tommy's face, but catching his shoulder and chest instead as Tommy sprung to his feet.

He knew better than to wait for Quackity to do anything- it was better to act first and think later in citations like this. Well, his brother always taught him the opposite, but his fighting style had changed since then.

He lunged at Quackity, tackling the man to the ground and wrestling for the knife.

Quackity cursed loudly, swiping the knife at Tommy's face again, ending up just nicking his ear. Tommy grabbed his wrist, pressing it against the ground, pinning Quackity down the best he could.

"Big Q, I don't know what happened to Purple. Let's just be adults and-"

Tommy thought he had been pretty reasonable, but Quackity must have disagreed. With his free hand, he shoved Tommy's now-injured shoulder, knocking him over and effectively freeing himself. Tommy shouted- more of a sound than an actual word- thrashing as Quackity now pinned him to the ground.

He thought the knife would be pressed to his throat or something, but it wasn't. Instead, the gun was pressed to his head.

“Let’s make it very clear here, Tommy,” Quackity panted, “*I’m* the one in charge. You don’t get to shove me around.”

Tommy glared daggers up at him. “I don’t like getting tortured, prick,” He spat back.

“I wasn’t going to torture you,” Quackity replied plainly.

The man was lying through his teeth and it was obvious. Even if his body language didn’t scream dishonesty, nobody locked another person in a room like that without the purpose of torturing them. Especially not when that room had no windows, an unpickable lock, and a plastic folding chair. He was surprised he hadn’t been handcuffed or something along the way.

Oh, not to mention the gun Quackity currently held to Tommy’s head.

“You-” Deep breath, “You literally shoved a knife in my face!”

“I wasn’t going to *use* it. I’m not a *monster*, Tommy.”

Tommy gave him a look. If he could move his hands, he would have gestured to the cut across his chest and shoulder. Sure, it wasn’t deep, but it was there.

“That was an accident,” Quackity mumbled. That part could have been the truth, actually. But only because Quackity had been aiming for his face.

“Mhm,” Tommy glanced at the gun aimed at his head. It was pressed against his temple, just lightly enough so he knew it was there. He looked back to Quackity.

“You have to understand, it’s nothing personal.”

Tommy’s eyes flicked back to the gun, narrowing just slightly.

“All I want to know is where Purpled is. Dream tells you everything, surely you would know.”

“Dream doesn’t tell me everything,” Tommy muttered. The knife was somewhere on the floor, probably no more than two feet out of arm’s reach, but he was more focused on the gun.

“Is this really something worth dying over? The location of one kidnapped kid?”



“You’re not going to kill me.”

Quackity made a face. “You’re right, I won’t start with your head. I think the first bullet will go into your arm- it’ll make the pain last longer.”

Quackity shifted the gun just slightly, and that was enough for Tommy. He brought his hands up, wrapping fingers around Quackity’s hand and the gun and jerking them both to the side. He kneed Quackity near the abdomen, at an angle so as to push him off.

He wasn’t surprised that it worked, but he *was* surprised that it worked so well. In mere seconds, Quackity was on the floor. Tommy took the opportunity to rip the gun from his hands and point it at Quackity.

He flicked off the safety and scrambled to his feet. Quackity, still on the ground, stared at him with wide eyes. He looked genuinely shocked to have been bested by Tommy.

Tommy flashed him a fake smile- the one he used when he was pretending to be a kind civilian. “Don’t take it personally, Big Q. I’m a professional SMP agent, you didn’t stand a chance.”

Quackity narrowed his eyes. “You’re really going to shoot me? Inside my own casino?”

He shrugged. “I might.” It was a blatant lie, but Quackity didn’t need to know that. “Unless...”

“Unless?” He raised an eyebrow.

“Give me your keycard.”

A beat.

Quackity reached into his pocket and pulled out an ID card. He tossed it to Tommy, who caught it easily.

“I’m going to leave, but I’m sure someone will find you eventually.”

No response other than a snarl.

“Cool, cool...” He lowered the gun and pressed the keycard against the scanner, pulling the handle once the door unlocked. “Well, have a good day, big guy.”

Quackity began to say something, but Tommy had already slipped out of the door.

It wasn't long before he made it back to the main floor. He flicked the safety back on, tucked the gun into the waistband of his pants, and quickly made his way to the exit.

One of the cons of a casino was the lack of clocks and windows. It was a design to make people feel like they were spending no time inside at all. Now, this wasn't as big of a deal now with the evolution of smartphones. However, Tommy had given his phone to the security guard, and he had a feeling he wasn't going to get it back.

Needless to say, it was a bit of a shock when he walked outside the doors to find the sun barely beginning to set. He had come in mid-morning, and his interaction with Quackity only lasted maybe ten minutes.

How long had he spent in that room panicking? Surely it hadn't been *that* long.

...

It might have been, actually. Now that he was outside of the casino, walking vaguely in the direction of SMP headquarters, his stomach growled. It made sense, if he had missed two meals.

He wondered if he could get to the L'manburg cafe before it closed...

## Chapter End Notes

your comments, hand 'em over 🍷 /lh /nf

# ten

## Chapter Summary

“Ranboo, tell Tubbo I’m not a dumb blonde,” Tom demanded. He would have sounded angry if not for the huge grin on his face.

Tubbo was in the same boat. “Ranboo, tell Tom that it’s not his hair color that makes him dumb.”

“You know what?” Tom took a step to the door. “I’m going home. Maybe you’ll be nicer tomorrow.”

## Chapter Notes

fun fact of the day: I was going to name this chapter "zero search results", but I liked the irony of chapter 4 being named 10

Twenty-eight. He had narrowed down his search to twenty-eight people, ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-four, all with varying shades of blonde hair.

He actually had managed to talk to a few people who had seen Red in passing. Apparently, the photo was from around six months ago, which wasn’t quite as recent as Ranboo had assumed, but not too far off, either.

The witnesses said that Red was directly at Dream’s side the entire night and refused to talk to anyone even when directly spoken to. He was tall, but that was the most definite feature anyone had spoken about.

Dream had refused to be in any pictures that night, and made sure to quickly move himself and Red out of the way of any cameras, so they weren’t even in the background of any shots.

Ten.

There were ten tall, blonde, young adult males who worked for the SMP. Ten was a very reasonable number, something Phil would be able to work with.

Although he didn't get the chance to tell Phil yet. He was gone when Ranboo woke up in the morning, and though he asked Techno to talk to Phil about it, he doubted the man would actually do it. Then, with school being so busy with tests, he hadn't even been able to text Phil at any point.

By the time he managed to send a text to Phil, he had finished his school and made it back to the empty house. Phil wouldn't be home for several hours, and he wouldn't appreciate Ranboo taking the bus there to check in on him, so... he flopped down on his bed and pulled out his phone, quickly shooting Tubbo a message.

*Ranboo: Hey, what are you doing right now?*

Tubbo responded within seconds.

*Tubbo: At work, but it's empty. You should come, I'm boredddd*

Ranboo rolled his eyes at the message, but couldn't help but smile. He knew Tubbo really didn't get a lot of business working the 'late shift' at the cafe. Sure, occasional people would come in for food or directions, but most people weren't ordering coffee at six at night.

It wasn't long before Ranboo ended up at the L'manburg cafe, promising to keep Tubbo company until closing. Besides, it was a Friday night, which meant he wasn't really going to be doing anything, anyway.

The L'manburg cafe was a pretty nice building, even if one of their lights would occasionally flicker. The floor and tables were spotless, too- probably a result of Tubbo cleaning early out of pure boredom.

Not that Ranboo minded. Usually he would only come in the morning before school, when the building was crowded and an absolute mess.

Tubbo leaned dramatically over the counter. “It’s so *boring* here, ‘Boo.’”

Ranboo laughed and pat Tubbo on the head. “I feel like you’re being a little dramatic.”

“I haven’t had a customer in three hours,” Tubbo complained. “Not even my regular is here today.”

“You have a nightly regular?”

Tubbo nodded. “Yeah, this guy, Tom. He comes in most nights I work and hangs out ‘till closing. Makes it a lot less boring, but *apparently* he decided not to show up.”

“Yeah? Does he go to your college or something?”

“Nah, not yet. Oh! Apparently he’s a foster kid like you, though. Said he moved here a few weeks ago,” Tubbo said, sounding rather excited, “I thought you two might get along.”

Ranboo raised an eyebrow. “Because we’re both foster kids?”

Tubbo’s eyes went wide in panic. “What? No! No, that’s not- I mean-”

Ranboo burst out laughing. “Relax, it’s fine, Tubbo. Although I’m sure we’re in pretty different situations when it comes to foster care.”

“That’s not what I mean!” Tubbo insisted.

Ranboo rolled his eyes. “Mhm, sure.”

“No, he just reminds me of you. You’re both all... Weird.”

“We’re... Weird?”

A nod. “Yeah. If he comes today, you’ll meet him and see what I’m talking about. But usually he’s here by now, so...”

Ranboo hummed in response, glancing at the door behind him as if Tom would walk through. He didn’t, of course.

“How about your work? You figure out your research in the last few days?” Tubbo asked, standing up straight so he was no longer leaning across the counter.

“Actually, yeah. I narrowed it down enough that Phil can work with what I found.” The explanation probably made no sense, but he couldn’t get much more specific than that.

Tubbo nodded along to his words. “I’m sure Phil’s excited about that.”

“Uh...” Ranboo frowned. “Actually, Phil’s in a bad mood right now. Some anniversary of... Something.”

Tubbo frowned, too. “Oh. That sucks...”

“Yeah. But I think-“

Ranboo didn’t get to finish that sentence as the front door was slammed open, so loudly that Ranboo couldn’t even hear the ring of the bell over it.

The first thing Ranboo thought was that this was a tall, blonde, young adult (well, teenage) man. The second was... well, it was noticing everything else.

He wore a plain grey t-shirt, stained with blood. The main spot was between his chest and shoulder, coming from what must have been a large cut. The second spot came from the bottom of his earlobe, dripping down his neck and onto the collar of his shirt.

His hair was mussed up, his eyes were tired, and he didn’t even spare Ranboo a second glance, heading straight for the counter.

“Large caramel frappe and-” He began.

“Tom! What the hell happened?” Tubbo exclaimed, already moving out from behind the counter to close the distance between them. Ranboo was honestly surprised that Tubbo was dealing with the injuries so well.

“Got mugged, big man. I just want a-”

Tubbo’s eyes went wide. “You were *mugged*? Holy-”

“You know, it’s really rude to deny a paying customer,” Tom mumbled, finally taking a moment to glance at Ranboo. He did a double take, miniscule enough that most people probably wouldn’t notice, but Ranboo did.

He wasn’t surprised about it, honestly. He had vitiligo, and about half of his face was lighter than the rest, even if they were both shades of white. It was a bit different than most people, and he was mostly just glad Tom didn’t stare, gaze going back to Tubbo.

Ah, Tubbo. Tubbo’s hands were on Tom’s upper arms, grabbing him and shaking him slightly as if that would help the injuries.

“Tubbo, how about you get a first aid kit? And Tom, you should take a seat,” Ranboo suggested, pulling out a chair for Tom.

Tubbo immediately rushed to the back to grab the first aid kit. Tom, however, seemed a little more hesitant. He looked at Ranboo for a moment, eyebrows furrowed a tiny amount. It reminded Ranboo a lot of Technoblade, who could scrutinize a person’s entire appearance and personality with an imperceivable expression.

Eventually, Tom let out a sigh and sat on the barstool. “You’re Ranboo, then?” Tom asked, looking up at him.

“That’s me, yeah. And you’re Tom,” Ranboo replied.

“Ranboo’s an awful name, you know that?”

Ranboo blinked, taking a moment to process the remark. “I- I like my name. Why would you-” He sputtered, but was cut off when Tubbo ran back in.

Tubbo practically slammed the first aid kit on the counter, opening it up and rifling through the contents. He pulled out gauze, bandages, bandaids, antiseptic- Ranboo stopped watching after the antiseptic, realizing Tubbo was going to keep going until the kit was empty. So he turned his attention back to Tom.

“Do you mind taking off your shirt?”

Tommy’s eyes widened and an affronted look spread across his face. “What- you are a *wrongun*, Ranboob, you know that? I’m a minor, what is *wrong* with you?”

Oh, this guy was a lot to deal with.

“Tom- I didn’t-” He took a deep breath before continuing, “So we can clean the wound.”

A beat.

“Oh.”

With that, the bloody shirt was discarded on the floor. It was a shame for Tubbo, really, who definitely would have to mop again after this.

It was a knife wound- Ranboo recognized it. Technoblade had been stabbed several times at this point, though only once was Ranboo allowed to see before it was wrapped in bandages. At least this wasn't a stab, more of a light slash than anything else.

Ranboo was actually relieved at this revelation. Stab wounds were usually messy, but this was nothing more than a flesh wound. It would hurt, sure, but it didn't look bad enough to even need stitches.

Contrasting Ranboo's reaction, Tubbo paled.

"I think I'm gonna be sick," He mumbled, pressing bandages into Ranboo's hand before darting to the break room.

Tom made a face.

"Don't take it personally," Ranboo assured, "He can't handle blood. I'm surprised he made it this long, actually... I scraped my knee falling off a bike once and he couldn't look at me for the rest of the day."

Tom snorted. "Yeah, he seems like the type."

Ranboo dropped the bandages back on the counter and picked up an antiseptic wipe. "Don't say that, he's a very nice person."

"It's not an- ow!" Tom yelped as Ranboo pressed the antiseptic wipe against the cut.

Ranboo wasn't a mean person, okay? He had just been... Distracted, is all. Otherwise, he totally would have warned Tom that he was about to put the wipe on the wound and that it would hurt. Yeah. Totally.

"Oops," Ranboo said, forcing a bit of an apologetic tone.

"It wasn't an insult," Tommy said through gritted teeth.

"Mhm, I- hang on, did you call me 'Ranboob' earlier?"

Tom shrugged, feigning innocence.

"I see why you got mugged now," Ranboo muttered, mostly as a joke, even if a little truth may have shone through.

Tom shot him a glare. "Die, Ranboo."

Ranboo just laughed at that.



It didn't take long for him to patch up Tom's shoulder. The bleeding had mostly stopped anyway, and Ranboo ended up just using several large bandaids to cover the wound.

He grabbed a new antiseptic wipe and cleaned off the blood from Tom's ear. If the tiny cut wasn't still bleeding, he would have ignored it entirely, but it was, so he stuck a small bandaid on it and... Paused.

"You good, big man?" Tom asked, giving Ranboo the side-eye though not actually turning his head as to not mess up Ranboo's work.

"I... Uh..."

Behind Tom's ear was a scar, maybe half the size of a fingernail. It looked fairly old, considering it was a stark white instead of an angry red. It curled in on itself in the crude shape of a C.

Ranboo froze.

He knew that symbol well. And of course he did, because he had one himself, tucked behind his left ear.

Tall, blonde, young adult male. Tom didn't display the signs of a Crimson survivor, but he didn't need to. Not with that scar making it clear that he was one.

Seeing Tom up close, it made sense. Freckles lightly dusted his cheeks, but there were also tiny scars all over his face. It reminded Ranboo of someone who had been hit by broken glass or something- covered in these superficial wounds.

That would also explain why he reminded Ranboo of Techno.

"Alright, enough of the staring, Boob Boy." Tom stood suddenly, all but shoving Ranboo away.

Ranboo gave him a look. "You've gotta be kidding me-"

"Tubbo!" Tom shouted, completely ignoring Ranboo. "We're done now. And I still want my drink!"

Tubbo emerged from the back quickly, still pale, but less so than before. He didn't even look at Tom, going to make the drink instead.

Oh, Ranboo probably looked so rude. This kid had a scar with no explanation of where it came from- and presumably no memory of most of his life, if he was anything like Ranboo- and Ranboo had just *stared* at him.

Without thinking, he pulled off his sweatshirt and handed it to Tom. Ranboo had worn a t-shirt underneath anyway, and wouldn't get too cold on the walk home. Worst case, he could call Technoblade and ask for a ride.

"I don't want your clothes, Boob Boy," Tom snarled, "Who knows where you've been." Still, he quickly pulled on the sweatshirt. It fit him surprisingly well considering Ranboo was at least five inches taller than him.

They fell into an awkward silence after that. Time passed slowly before Tubbo slammed the frappuccino on the counter.

Tom grabbed the cup and took a large gulp of coffee.

"Well," He said, smoothing out the sweatshirt, "As much as I love getting stared at by Boob Boy over here, I should really head home."

Tubbo frowned heavily. "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

Tom gave him a look. "I'll be fine. I'm a big man."

"A big man who got *mugged*."

"That was a one-time deal." Tom went so far to roll his eyes.

Tubbo didn't look convinced. "Sure. And when I read in the news that some dumb blonde kid got-"

"Dumb blonde kid?" Tom screeched.

They kept arguing, but Ranboo started to tune them out. It was a little odd, honestly, how they bickered like old friends despite only knowing each other for only a week. Ranboo and Tubbo had a long period of time where they both refused to say any grievances against each other.

They seemed like good friends, anyway. It made sense, he guessed. Ranboo and Tubbo had clicked pretty quickly, too, it's just...

“Ranboo, tell Tubbo I’m not a dumb blonde,” Tom demanded. He would have sounded angry if not for the huge grin on his face.

Tubbo was in the same boat. “Ranboo, tell Tom that it’s not his hair color that makes him dumb.”

“You know what?” Tom took a step to the door. “I’m going home. Maybe you’ll be nicer tomorrow.”

Ranboo frowned. “Are you sure you’ll-“ He just wanted to ask if Tom would be okay on the walk.

“I’ll be fine, *Ranboob*. Besides, foster parents ‘ll be wondering where I am.”

Ranboo nodded at that. Phil would have a heart attack if Ranboo had disappeared for even a few hours, too. “Want me to walk you home?” He offered, partially for the guy’s safety but also because he had... Questions.

“Nah. I don’t live too far from here, anyway.” And with that, he was out the door before either boy could mention it.

It wasn’t too long before Tubbo shuffled Ranboo towards the exit, too, saying he couldn’t have people in the store while closing.

“Hey, that Tom guy,” Ranboo started, picking his words carefully. “What’s his last name?”

Tubbo gave him a look. “Simmons, I think. Why?”

“He... Looks familiar, is all. I don’t think I know him, though. The name doesn’t ring a bell. Goodnight, Tubbo.”

Tubbo frowned but nodded. ““Night, ‘Boo.”

And with that, Ranboo walked home.

—!—!—!—

Phil was sitting in the living room, a thick book in his lap, when Ranboo got home. He looked exhausted, eyes just slightly tinted red and puffy. Had he been crying?

He pushed past that, though. This Tom thing was important.

“Phil,” Ranboo said.

“Ranboo,” Phil said, at the same time.

After an uncomfortable amount of silence, Ranboo sighed. “You go first.”

Phil glanced up at him, then forced a thin smile onto his face. “Techno said you were worried about me.”

“Ah- I didn’t-“ Ranboo stuttered out, desperately trying to come up with a half-baked excuse.

“I’m sorry, kiddo, I didn’t mean to worry you.”

Ranboo hesitated to respond. “It’s okay, Phil. I just... it’s okay.”

“It’s okay to talk about your feelings, you know,” Phil offered.

“You don’t.” Immediately, Ranboo clapped a hand over his mouth. He hadn’t meant to say that.

“I...”

“I’m sorry, Phil, I didn’t mean to- I didn’t mean it like that. I just- it’s been a long day and I-“

“Take a seat, Ranboo.”

A beat passed before Ranboo sat down.

“Tomorrow is the anniversary of my son’s death.”

Several more horrible seconds of silence ticked by.

“I didn’t know. I- I’m so sorry,” Ranboo spoke quickly, rushing to get the words out.

Phil flashed him a half-smile. “It’s fine, Ranboo. You didn’t know. I... I should have told you, I think.”

Ranboo grimaced. “You didn’t have to.”

Phil gave him a look. “I constantly tell you to talk about your feelings; it would be hypocritical if I didn’t talk about them, too. Besides, it was years ago, anyway.”

“Still...”

More silence lapsed until Phil awkwardly cleared his throat. “I’m sure you have questions.”

As much as he didn’t want to be rude, Ranboo couldn’t say he wasn’t curious. “How old was he?”

“Twenty-one. We, uh... Had lost contact by the time he passed.”

“What was he like?”

A faint smile grew on Phil’s lips. “He was brilliant. Maybe not as academic as you, but a genius on his own. Not to mention, he was amazing at speaking to people.”

Ranboo raised an eyebrow.

“Just the way he would speak. He could convince anyone to do anything, I’m pretty sure. Just that good at connecting with people.”

“Ah. He... He sounds nice.”

“He was,” Phil agreed.

After a moment, Ranboo dared voice the question he had had since the start of the conversation. “What happened to him?”

Any semblance of a smile was immediately gone. “He died in an explosion, in a mission that he never should have gone in in the first place.”

Phil stood up suddenly, clearly indicating the conversation was over.

“I- I have some work I need to get done. Goodnight, Ranboo. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Uh, okay.” Ranboo barely got the words out before Phil disappeared up the stairs.

Okay- new rule: don’t talk about Phil’s son. Or, at least, don’t talk about what happened to him. Phil seemed almost happy to talk about the positive things, though, so Ranboo would have to keep that in mind... Maybe, anyway. Maybe not- not after Phil’s reaction at the very end. Yeah, that was... Rough.

—!—!—!—

Ranboo handed Phil the list of names two days later, making no promises that any of them were Red, but assuring him that they were their best chances. Worst case, Ranboo could just add all of the other blondes back into his list and then give that to Phil, though he doubted Phil would want to send agents out to research that many people.

Still, Ranboo's mind kept wandering back to Tom. Tom, with the messy hair and the *knife wounds*. Tom, with a scar clearly indicating he had something to do with the Crimson. Tom, who... Who could have been Red, but Ranboo wasn't willing to admit that quite yet. Not when he truly seemed to just be a seventeen year-old foster kid just trying to survive.

Though that didn't mean he couldn't still be involved in this stuff. Ranboo had heard rumors of child spies; this wasn't too far out of the realm of possibility.

"Techno," Ranboo started the conversation over lunch. Neither Ranboo nor Technoblade liked eating lunch with people, so they had come to an agreement to awkwardly sit in the silence of Techno's office while they ate, both pretending that the other wasn't there.

Technoblade didn't look pleased that Ranboo had spoken. He grunted in response.

"How many Crimson survivors are there, again?"

Technoblade gave him a look.

"Just- please, Techno?"

Technoblade held up a finger. After a moment of chewing, he swallowed his food, then spoke. "Two. You, and Karl Jacobs."

Ranboo furrowed his eyebrows. "And... That's it? No one else?"

"Nope," Techno replied, popping the 'p'.

"Not even any leads on any possible ones?"

"No leads, and let's hope we don't get any." A beat. "No offense to you or anything, just... You both were pretty rough when we found you. Wouldn't wish that on anyone else, you know?"

Ranboo nodded slowly. "Yeah, yeah, that makes sense."

And they went back to silently eating their meals together.

The stack of paperwork had been returned to Ranboo's desk, but he shoved it off to the side, instead heading towards his regular research websites, as well as foster care records. He wanted to know everything he could about Tom Simmons, and was going to go through some lengths to do so.

...

Not in a creepy way, though. Just in a curious way. Surely there was a better way to phrase that, but Ranboo didn't particularly care about it at the moment.

He started by searching social media. The only active accounts clearly weren't run by the right Tom, and any ones that could vaguely be his hadn't been touched in years. That was a dead-end, then.

He checked the school websites, figuring that maybe he just hadn't enrolled yet when he couldn't find Tom on any list.

It was only when he typed 'Tom Simmons' into the foster care records that he really became... Concerned? Confused? Conflicted, maybe.

*Zero search results for Tom Simmons.*

That was fine, though. Tom could have been a nickname, anyway. Or, maybe he had spelled the last name wrong.

*Zero search results for Thomas Simmons*

*Zero search results for Tomas Simmons*

*Zero search results for Tom Simons*

*Zero search re-*

Ranboo exited out of the tab, a tight frown forming on his lips. He had expected... Well, he had expected *something*. Ranboo's Crimson case was from three years ago. Karl's was from five. If they went with the median of four years, that meant Tom would have been fourteen, which only brought more concern.

How would a fourteen year-old have survived on his own for four years? Did that mean Tom was homeless? Oh, no, that probably meant that Tom was homeless... Maybe Ranboo could invite him over- no, he was getting ahead of himself.

Technoblade always told him that one of the most important things to do- in any situation, but especially in agent work- is to learn as much as you can about the situation before you act on anything. Jumping to conclusions can get you- or someone else- killed, and it would be dangerous to be reckless like that, especially when one could afford to take some time and research.

So that was what Ranboo was going to do. He would do some field research on Tom and learn more about him before he came to any firm conclusions. And then, from there, he would... Well, he should have already told Phil, shouldn't he?

It was far too late for that. Besides, maybe this could be a way for Ranboo to sort of... Prove himself, he supposed. Not that Phil doubted him, but Phil rarely let him aim high enough, either. Phil was usually scared for Ranboo's safety, which was why Ranboo had barely convinced him to let him be an intern. Although, considering the information he had learned about Phil's son the night before, maybe he could see *why* Phil had been so concerned.

No matter, though. It was one seventeen year-old. Ranboo could absolutely handle that, even if the guy did seem to be a bit of a handful.

That was the plan, then. He could stop by the L'manburg Cafe after work and see if Tom was there, maybe talk to him, ask some questions about his life and stuff. Yeah, cool. It was a plan, then.

He turned to the pile of paperwork on his desk and grimaced. Listen, he was glad that Phil gave him a job at all, but... Maybe he could go ask someone if they needed help with whatever they were working on. Anything would be better than sorting papers.



# you're something else

## Chapter Summary

“Caramel frappe and two muffins.”

“What kind of muffins?”

He swore he had just had this conversation. Unfortunately, he couldn't quite remember the outcome. “...Muffin kind.”

“We have chocolate chip, blueberry-” The cashier started listing.

“Two blueberry muffins.” He quickly cut in. “The big guy's paying,” He said, pointing his thumb back at Ranboo, who stood awkwardly behind him.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The first thing Dream asked Tommy when he got back was where he had gotten the sweatshirt. No ‘hi, how are you?’ or ‘why were you missing for six hours?’. No, just a ‘where did you get that sweatshirt?’ and a deathly glare.

“Got it from a friend of a friend,” Tommy shrugged, refusing to falter under Dream's gaze.

“Tubbo's friend was at the cafe today.”

Dream's glare didn't lessen. “And you took his sweatshirt... Why?”

“Mine was covered in blood,” He said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Why would-”

“Quackity threatened to torture me. I don't think he was really going to do it, ‘cause... You know, he's Quackity,” He let out a harsh laugh, “But still. Caught me pretty good with the knife. Boob Boy let me borrow his shirt.”

Dream pinched the bridge of his nose, taking a deep breath before he spoke. “Give me a profile of this... Boy.”

“Approximately fifteen to eighteen years old, six-foot-six male. Light brown hair, brown eyes. Pale, but spots of darker skin over part of his face and arms. I think it's... Vigilante, or something?” Tommy scrunched up his face in thought.

“Vitiligo,” Dream corrected. “Is that your full report?”

Tommy bit his lip. As much as he didn't want to tell Dream about any of this- for his own safety as well as Ranboo's- he also didn't want to get in trouble when Dream inevitably found out. “He saw my scar.”

Tommy had a lot of scars. Small ones littered his entire body, medium-sized ones were on both sides of his forehead, and his knees were scarred something awful from all the running and tripping he did as a kid. Still, it was deathly clear what scar Tommy had meant when he said ‘my scar’.

“And?” Dream prompted.

“I think he recognized it. I don’t know if he knows Karl or-”

Dream grabbed him by the shoulders roughly. “We don’t talk about *him*, Tommy.”

Tommy nodded quickly. “I- sorry. I really think he recognized it, though. He froze for a long time when he saw it, and it took a bit for me to get his attention.”

Dream let go of Tommy’s shoulder, pinching his nose again. Another sharp breath. “That’s fine, we’ll work with it. Anything else I should know?”

“Yeah. Quackity tried to torture me.”

Dream not only looked uninterested, but he also didn’t look even a little bit surprised.

“Dream... You didn’t send me in there *knowing* he would do that,” Tommy said, sounding unsure.

“I knew he wouldn’t hurt you.”

Tommy shot him a glare. “I had to get a new shirt because my old one was *bloodstained*.”

“You’re still walking, you’re fine.” Dream waved it off easily.

“You sent me in there *knowing* he would try to torture me? He held a gun to my head!”

Dream rolled his eyes. “And yet he didn’t shoot you.”

Tommy shot him a glare, then changed the subject. “What happened to Purpled?”

“As far as anyone’s aware, the poor orphan just went missing. No one knows where- probably just skipped town,” Dream shrugged.

Tommy scowled. “He’s not another... You know. Is he?”

“You didn’t like him much anyway, did you?”

The scowl fell into genuine disappointment. “He doesn’t deserve it.”

“I know, I know.” Dream sighed. “But think of the good this will do for the world. Think of all the lives that will be changed. We’re almost done with the research- it’s almost perfected at this point. Surely Purpled is worth that?”

Tommy’s expression didn’t change, but he nodded nonetheless.

“Exactly. Now, unless you need anything else-”

“Food would be nice, actually,” Tommy interrupted. Normally he wouldn’t ask, but all he had to eat today was a caramel frappuccino, and he doubted that was good for him.

Dream half-smiled. “Sure, Toms. I’ll have someone bring some to your room.”

That was his way of ending the conversation, obviously, and Tommy wasn’t going to argue with it. He went off to his room quickly, letting out a sigh of relief as he closed the door behind him.

He barely kicked his shoes off before jumping into bed, lying face-down on his pillow. It had been a long day, and it wasn’t long before he drifted off to sleep.

No one actually ended up bringing food, but he didn’t particularly care. He wouldn’t have wanted to be woken up, anyway.

—!—!—!—

He started his work on convincing Dream to let Purpled go that next morning. It wasn’t even that he particularly liked Purpled, but the guy had done nothing to deserve a kidnapping, even if he was part of Las Nevadas.

“Quackity’s already furious,” He tried, pulling his legs up on his chair and against his chest. He sat in Dream’s office, across from Dream as the man did some sort of work on his computer.

Dream looked unimpressed. “He usually is.”

“He’s... He’s seventeen, Dream. He’s a *child*,” He tried next, attempting to appeal to any sense of morality Dream might have, even though it wasn’t much.

“He’s practically an adult. Tommy, if you don’t have anything-”

“Does Sapnap know?”

Sapnap was one of Dream’s best friends. They had met some time in childhood, and ended up becoming agents of the SMP together. After years of missions, Dream went on to become director, and Sapnap moved up to deputy director, the position right underneath Dream.

Dream blinked. “What do you mean?”

“Does he know you kidnapped his fiancé’s kid?”

Sapnap and Quackity had been engaged for... A while now. Tommy was pretty sure they had been for as long as Tommy had worked at the SMP, if not longer. They were usually in the middle of some disagreement, but at the end of the day they got along.

Purpled was not actually Quackity’s kid. As far as Tommy knew, Purpled had either shown up to Las Nevadas and never left, or he showed up to Las Nevadas and Quackity decided to make it his own problem. Either way, he ended up working as a sort of mercenary for the group when he wasn’t too busy being an angsty teenager.

“Purpled isn’t his fiancé’s kid.”

Tommy made a face. “He treats him like he is. Even if he isn’t- you really think Sapnap’s going to be okay with it?”

Dream sighed. He dragged a hand across his face, probably trying to signify his annoyance, as if his expression wasn’t enough. “What do you suggest, then?”

“Oh, easy. Let Purpled go,” Tommy said as if it was the simplest thing in the world.

“We need him for research, we can’t just-”

“You’re two days in, you can start over and kidnap some random person for it, I don’t care. Just not anybody we know.”

Dream’s eyes flicked from his computer up to Tommy. “And what exactly makes you think you’re in the position to be making demands?”

Tommy took a slow, careful breath in. He had to be cautious about how he approached this one. “Again, Quackity tried to torture me,” He said, keeping it... Relatively light, actually. “Imagine the hell he’s gonna raise when he finds out what you did to Purpled.”

The corner of Dream’s mouth twitched just slightly. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay. I’ll let the kid go. He’ll be disoriented for a few days, but unharmed.”

“Oh. Cool.” Tommy slowly straightened his legs, moving them away from his chest until they hit the floor. “Thank you.” A beat. “Sir.”

“Yeah, yeah. Now go run off, I have work to get done and you’re distracting me.”

“Of course, sir.” And with that, he left the office.

Usually he wouldn’t go to the L’manburg Cafe today. It was one of Tubbo’s days off, so it wasn’t like he had a reason to go. However, he decided to stop by anyway in... Celebration of getting Purpled out? He didn’t know. Didn’t particularly care.

There were three people in the coffee shop when he entered. A little bit busier than normal, but nothing he couldn’t handle. He could just hide out in the back while he drank his coffee. Ooh, maybe he’d order a muffin, too. That sounded nice, especially after not really eating the day before.

It should have taken him less time to recognize Ranboo than it actually did. He could blame it on the fact that Ranboo was sitting so he didn’t look as ridiculously tall, as well as the fact his back was turned. Was his height and vitiligo his most defining traits? Sure. But Tommy was a spy, he should be able to recognize a person without those things.

Ranboo hadn’t turned around yet, and Tommy was honestly tempted to turn around himself and walk back home. It wasn’t that he hated Ranboo, even if he did get on his nerves, but... Well, Ranboo had caught him after he got ‘mugged’ yesterday, and it just felt like it would be an awkward conversation. Besides, Tommy hadn’t brought the sweatshirt with him, and he had a feeling Ranboo would want that back.

Oh. Ranboo had turned around and gave a small wave to Tommy.

Tommy plastered a smile onto his face and waved back. He took a few quick strides over to the boy.

“Ranboob, my man,” He greeted.

“Uh- it’s *Ranboo* actually,” Ranboo awkwardly corrected.

“Whatever you say, Ranboob.”

Ranboo grimaced. *Properly* grimaced. Tommy almost laughed at the sight. “Uh... How are you doing, Tom?”

“Oh, great, just here for my evening cup of coffee. You know how it is.”

“I meant with the... Uh...” He paused, then awkwardly gestured to Tommy’s shoulder. Oh.

“Never better. I mean, it was barely a tiny injury, anyway. Nothing the big man Tom Simmons can’t deal with.”

Ranboo snorted. “Big man?”

Tommy’s fake smile fell into something akin to offense. “Are you doubting me?”

“No, no,” There was a small, amused smile on Ranboo’s face. “Just that you’re so much shorter than me, is all.”

Tommy let out an exaggerated gasp. “I am *not*!”

“You’re a head shorter than me, dude,” Ranboo laughed.

“That’s- that’s a *blatant lie*, you piece of-”

“It’s okay, Tom. Tubbo’s short, too, you know.”

“I swear if I had coffee I would pour it on you right now, you little-”

He was cut off by another loud laugh from Ranboo. He couldn’t help but find himself laughing along, too. It wasn’t often that people found his threats endearing instead of... Well, threatening. Or at least annoying. This was a nice change of pace.

“Can I buy you coffee?” Ranboo asked once the laughter had calmed down.

Tommy blinked. “You want to buy me coffee after I threatened to pour it on you?”

“Well... I was hoping you wouldn’t actually pour it on me. Maybe, uh, maybe I’ll buy it for you if you promise to... Not do that?”

Tommy snorted. “Sure, big man.”

He stood and walked over to the cashier, Ranboo hurriedly getting up to follow.

“Caramel frappe and two muffins.”

“What kind of muffins?”

He swore he had just had this conversation. Unfortunately, he couldn’t quite remember the outcome. “...Muffin kind.”

“We have chocolate chip, blueberry-” The cashier started listing.

“Two blueberry muffins.” He quickly cut in. “The big guy’s paying,” He said, pointing his thumb back at Ranboo, who stood awkwardly behind him.

Ranboo paid quickly, and it wasn’t long before Tommy had a drink in one hand and a bag of food in the other, once again, now sitting in a booth across from Ranboo. Tommy took a sip of his drink before reaching into the bag and pulling out napkins. He set one in front of Ranboo, who looked confused until Tommy placed a muffin on top. He then did the same for himself.

“Tom, you don’t have to-”

“I don’t think you can tell me what to do with my own muffins. I bought them with my own money, I can decide what to do with them,” Tommy deadpanned.

Ranboo was taken aback. “I- what?”

“My food, my choice.” He pushed the muffin closer to Ranboo.

“...You know what? Sure. Thank you, Tom, I appreciate you sharing.”

Tommy flashed him a smile. “Of course. I’m just that kind of guy.”

The bell rang as the door opened. Ranboo was saying something, but Tommy had tuned him out to focus on the person walking in. He had a pretty good view of the door from his seat, even if he did have to lean a little to see.

In walked... Sapnap and... Was that Karl Jacobs? Oh, and Quackity. Great. Tommy shuffled a little further into the booth, going back to looking at Ranboo who was... giving him a really weird look.

“Do I have something on my face?” Tommy asked, shooting him a flare.

Ranboo shook his head wildly. “No, no, I just asked you a question and you didn’t respond. But maybe you didn’t hear me, it’s-“

“What did you ask?”

“I- I’m sure Tubbo told me already, but where are you from?” Ranboo asked, looking rather nervous.

“Brighton,” Tommy said simply.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watched the group of three approach the counter. By the time they reached the place to order, they had passed out of Tommy's vision. However, now Ranboo's eyes flicked to the group.

"How long did you live there for?" Ranboo asked, clearly trying to keep his gaze on Tommy, but failing.

"Three years."

"And where were you before that?"

"All over the place, Big Man. My... Parents were very restless," Tommy murmured. He should have crafted a better backstory for this Tom character.

"Oh, you went into foster care as an older child, then?" Ranboo asked.

If it was anyone else, Tommy would have called Ranboo out for being rude, but maybe it was fine for other foster kids to ask things like that. Tommy really wouldn't know- he hadn't been in foster care for a long time.

If he listened closely, he could hear Quackity ordering for his group. A black coffee, some sugary amalgamation, and a third coffee with a fairly reasonable amount of creamer and milk.

Tommy nodded. "I was around thirteen."

Ranboo hummed at that. "I get it. I was fourteen when I entered care. It's... it's a little weird coming in so late, yeah?"

"Oh yeah, definitely," Tommy agreed. He didn't actually know if that was true. Technically he *had* been in foster care, but-

"Ranboo?" Someone asked. They approached behind Tommy, making him barely hold in a flinch. He knew he wasn't going to be attacked, but his instincts said otherwise.

Ranboo awkwardly cleared his throat. "Uh, hey, Karl."

Tommy dared to glance behind him. It was Karl Jacobs in the flesh. He wore a bright colorblock sweater, and a pair of kaleidoscope sunglasses sat atop his fluffy hair. Tommy



wondered if he could see anything while wearing them on his eyes, or if they were just for accessory.

He thanked his lucky stars that Kral didn't seem to recognize him. Not that he expected him to, but one could never be too careful.

"I haven't seen you in ages. How have you been, man?" Karl asked. He was excited, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

"Oh, good, good. You?"

"Great, actually." He paused, then leaned in and stage-whispered, "I'm on a date right now."

Tommy frowned slightly, glancing back at Sapnap and Quackity, who didn't seem to notice Karl's disappearance.

"That's great for you, dude. Well, you have fun with that. I think I'll--"

"You should meet them! Here, hang on."

When Karl turned back to call the other two over, Tommy sunk down in his seat. He moved a hand to the side of his face, pretending to be adjusting his hair, though he was really just trying to hide.

It felt like no time passed at all before Sapnap and Quackity were at the side of the booth. Tommy could feel eyes on him, but wasn't sure who they belonged to.

At this point, Ranboo stood. Tommy watched in partial horror as he shook hands with Sapnap and Quackity, all the while mumbling polite greetings of 'nice to meet you's and other words that all meant the same thing.

"And who's your friend here?" Karl asked, sounding genuinely interested.

"Oh, this is Tom. We were just- uh- talking about... Life, I guess," Ranboo offered.

With a sigh, Tommy relinquished his last sense of anonymity. He dropped his hand from his face and stood up, flashing another bright smile at the three men.

Sapnap- along with everyone else at the SMP- had a rule. If you see someone you work with in public, you don't say hi to them. You don't smile or wave. You don't even *look* at them. You keep walking and pretend you don't know them.

Quackity, however, didn't have such a rule.

"Thomas," Quackity let out an awkward laugh, "I didn't expect to see you here."

Tommy grit his teeth. "Yeah, me neither." He clenched his fist at this side. Reasonably, he knew Quackity wouldn't try to hurt him in such a public space, but his nerves said otherwise.

Sapnap cleared his throat. "We should really get-"

"How are you doing, Thomas? I feel like it's been ages, kid," Quackity laughed again, really playing up the old friends gag.

Tommy shot him a glare, making direct eye-contact as he spoke. "Oh, good. Except someone *attacked me with a knife* last night."

Karl's eyes went wide. "Someone what?"

"I'm sure he's fine," Quackity quickly assured.

"Well, they were going to-" Tommy started only to be quickly interrupted.

"Is that what the bandage on your ear is from?" Karl asked.

Sapnap cleared his throat even louder. "We should get going. Ranboo, Tom, it was great meeting both of you." He grabbed both Quackity and Karl's hands, holding them tightly on his own. He started walking to the door. Karl faintly muttered something about them not getting their coffee yet, but neither Sapnap or Quackity seemed to notice, and the group quickly left.

Tommy let out an exasperated groan, dropping his arms onto the table and burying his head into them. In any other context, he would have found the situation funny. To run into Sapnap on a date with not only his fiancé but with *Karl Jacobs* of all people? Tommy could tease Sapnap about it for months.

...Not in a mean way, but in a sibling way. They weren't siblings by any means, but they treated each other like family. A lot of the higher ups in the SMP did, it was nice like that.

Ranboo, who definitely had a frown on his face, tapped Tommy on the shoulder lightly. When Tommy didn't move, Ranboo spoke up.

"Are you... Good?"

Tommy groaned again.

“So... How do you know Quackity?” Ranboo tried.

That got Tommy to raise his head. “He used to kiss my brother,” Tommy replied, deadpan.

A second after he said the sentence, his heart rate spied. He- he wasn’t supposed to say things like that. He *knew* he wasn’t supposed to say things like that. Saying things like that could get him in trouble in a lot of ways, and he really didn’t want to go down that road.

“Is Sapnap your brother?” Ranboo asked innocently.

Tommy held back a third groan. “Yeah, sure.”

Ranboo snorted. “Sure?” He questioned, parroting Tommy’s word.

“*Sure.*” Tommy repeated. He couldn’t help the smile that was growing on his face. “And how do you know Karl?”

“Friend of my dad,” Ranboo shrugged. “I don’t know him well, but I see him around every so often.”

Tommy nodded. “Makes sense. Personally, I would avoid my foster dad’s parents to the ends of the earth, but you do you.”

“You’re really... Something else, you know that?” It could have been an insult, but judging by the smile Ranboo was showing, it probably wasn’t.

“Most people find me annoying at first.” It was at this point he remembered that he had bought a muffin, and was quick to take a bite of it. He was mostly glad he hadn’t smashed it when he dropped his head to the table earlier.

“Yeah, well, telling strangers to die can do that to a person.”

Tommy rolled his eyes before taking a look at Ranboo.

He was seventeen or so, brown hair parted heavily to the side, falling over his face and eyes. Tommy wondered how he could even see with it like that. His skin wasn’t littered with scars like Tommy’s was, but Tommy hadn’t missed the calluses the boy had on both hands. They could have come from handling weapons, but that didn’t quite make sense in the context.

Ranboo was just a normal kid, right? A normal kid who was... Weirdly calm when it came to knife wounds. A normal kid who knew Karl Jacobs. A normal kid who froze when he saw Tommy’s scar.

...

He would have to look into it. Maybe ask Tubbo to hack into some files- ha. That would really irritate Dream.

“You know what, Ranboo?” Tommy asked, suddenly.

Ranboo, who was halfway through peeling the wrapper off of his muffin, having not yet even taken a bite (what a weirdo), looked up. “What?”

“You’re something else, too.”

## Chapter End Notes

tommy: \*walks into the cafe\* why is mad world playing?

(get is cause mad word starts with "all around me are familiar faces"--

# wholesome friendly fun

## Chapter Summary

“The last time we played, Ranboo shot me point-blank,” Tubbo was rambling as he re-tied his shoes, tucking in the laces to avoid chances of tripping.

“It’s-” Ranboo laughed, “It’s not point-blank if they’re laser guns.”

“Hurt like hell,” Tubbo continued, as if Ranboo hadn’t spoken.

Tom snorted. “Do lasers hurt?”

“They do when they’re from Ranboo. Emotionally.”

All three burst out into laughter.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil became less distant as the days wore on. He ended up buying Ranboo a few new sweatshirts (not that he knew that Tom still hadn’t given his back), using them as a sort of apology for how he had acted. Tom called them ‘apology shirts’, which even Ranboo had to admit was sort of funny.

Speaking of Tom, he and Ranboo quickly became closer, too. Along with Tubbo, though Ranboo was already close to him. Despite them having never hung out outside of the cafe before, Tubbo had invited Tom to laser tag, claiming that it would make the teams ‘even’.

Technically, Tubbo wasn’t wrong. Even though it was usually a 1v1 between Tubbo and Ranboo, Ranboo was scarily good at laser tag. Despite never handling a gun in his life, he seemed to know all the tips and tricks on how to aim and dodge. He was pretty certain he could do it with his eyes closed.

Ranboo’s skill led to Tubbo losing nearly every time- the only time he could win being when he cheated at the game. Having Tom on Tubbo’s team would at least somewhat even the playing field, which was one of the big reasons why Ranboo didn’t complain about having to go against two people.

They found themselves in the laser tag place late one Tuesday night. They picked that time specifically because they knew the laser tag place would be empty. Well, that, and it was the only night both Ranboo and Tubbo didn't have work.

Tom had just pulled the vest over his shirt, now trying to adjust the straps to make it fit better. He looked pretty annoyed at it, actually. Probably because he couldn't quite get the straps to move since he was pulling on the wrong ones.

"The last time we played, Ranboo shot me point-blank," Tubbo was rambling as he re-tied his shoes, tucking in the laces to avoid chances of tripping.

"It's-" Ranboo laughed, "It's not point-blank if they're laser guns."

"Hurt like hell," Tubbo continued, as if Ranboo hadn't spoken.

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"They do when they're from Ranboo. Emotionally."

All three burst out into laughter.

It wasn't long before they entered the arena- on separate sides so they wouldn't go for each other right away.

For a brief moment, Ranboo closed his eyes and he breathed. It was a sort of... Well, tradition wasn't quite the right word. Routine, maybe? It was something he did before every game of laser tag. It helped him- not focus, actually. Sort of the opposite. It helped him let go of his mind and worries and to slip back into what felt like muscle memory.

The whole arena was a mix of glow-in-the-dark objects, no theme to them whatsoever. There was faux-graffiti art on some of the barrier walls, foam boxes were painted to look like wooden crates, and a few of the circular towers were painted as medieval buildings. It was a mess, but it always brought great memories.

Speaking of the towers, Ranboo made his way up the spiral staircase inside to the top of one, carefully sticking his head out one of its windows to look for the others.

He could see Tubbo darting around the floor, sticking to the perimeters of the objects in an attempt to have some semblance of cover.

Ranboo could have shot him from his spot in the tower. It would have been easy, but that would have taken the fun out of it. Instead, he slipped back down the stairway to find Tubbo

on foot.

He sauntered through the darkness, keeping a close eye out for any movement- though not seeing any. That was... Surprising, actually. Usually by now, Tubbo would get bored and start shouting to lure Ranboo near. Maybe Tom had managed to keep him entertained enough for now.

He passed through a small doorway, squeezing into something that resembled a witch's shack. Yeah, their theming really wasn't great. The shack was much further onto Tubbo and Tom's side, though, which was why Ranboo headed over there in an attempt to find them.

Music blared over the speakers, but not loud enough to muffle the footsteps that whizzed past behind him. Ranboo knew those footsteps- that was Tubbo. He turned quickly before darting after him, his long legs being a major advantage.

"Tubbo!" He shouted, raising his laser gun just slightly.

Tubbo- somewhere towards Ranboo's left- let out a startled scream. Clearly he had thought he had lost Ranboo, but Ranboo was much better at tracking than that.

Ranboo scrambled to catch him- moving much faster than before. Sure, he was *good* at laser tag, but he still had to *work* to keep up with Tubbo. He was slippery, and though Ranboo was good at shooting him, he had to catch him in order to do that.

Luckily, Ranboo could take fewer strides. As long as he kept up with Tubbo's pace, he just had to wait for the boy to tire out. They took so many turns that it made Ranboo dizzy- lefts, rights, up some stairs, down another set, through a doorway-

Ranboo grunted as he was tackled to the ground, his gun skittering across the floor uselessly. Tom was on top of him, legs on either side of Ranboo's, one hand on Ranboo's shoulder, the other on the laser gun which was currently pressed against the center panel of the vest.

"Any last words, Boob Boy?" Tom asked, looking down at him.

Ranboo let out a nervous chuckle. "Tell my family I love them? Oh, and tell Tubbo he-"

Tom pulled the trigger. Ranboo's vest made a loud sound as it lit up a bright purple color.

"-owes me five dollars," Ranboo finished. "You couldn't have waited four more seconds so I could end my sentence?"

Tom snorted. “That would be showing mercy, and showing mercy gets you killed, Boob Boy.” He climbed off of Ranboo and stood up, extending a hand to help up Ranboo.

Ranboo accepted and was pulled to his feet, just slightly towering over Tommy now. “Sounds a little too competitive for me, Tom.”

“What can I say?” He shrugged. “I’m a competitive guy.”

Ranboo gave him a look. “Mhm. I didn’t realize I was playing with a laser tag professional.”

Tom rolled his eyes. “I’ve never played before, I’m just that good.”

“Wait- you’ve never played laser tag before?” Ranboo asked.

“Nope,” Tommy said, flashing him a smile.

“Paintball, then?”

“No?”

“Nerf?”

Tom scrunched up his face. “Don’t know what that is, it sounds gross.”

Ranboo laughed. “It’s- it’s not *food*, Tom. It’s- they’re fake guns. They shoot foam bullets.”

Tom’s face only slightly relaxed. “Still sounds weird.”

“Really? For someone who strategizes in laser tag of all games, I thought you’d be into that stuff.”

“I… I’m not a huge fan of guns.”

Ranboo’s face fell. “Oh- shoot, I’m sorry, I didn’t realize. You know, we could go-”

“What? You’re quitting because you lost? Sorry if you’re a sore loser, Ranboo, but it sounded like Tubbo really wanted to play.” There was something… Else in his tone, especially when he asked if Ranboo was quitting. It was almost an invitation of sorts.

“I’m… Yeah, sure. Come on, let’s go get Tubbo.” Ranboo turned, glancing around for any sign of where his friend ran off to. He thought for sure Tubbo would have come over by now, but he hadn’t.

It took Tom clapping his hands around his mouth and shouting “Tubbo! We won! You can come out now!” before Tubbo emerged through a doorway. His laser gun was in his hands, and he was grinning.



“I was watching from a tower, that was *sick*, man!” Tubbo held his hand up, high fiving Tom before continuing. “Your plan worked so well. In your *face*, Ranboo!”

Ranboo just snickered.

“I think next round we should-”

“Actually,” Ranboo cut in, “The lights are sort of hurting my eyes. I was hoping we could head home early? Maybe stop for ice cream on the way or something.”

“For ice cream? Yeah, we can. You’re paying though,” Tubbo said.

“But you still owe me-”

Tubbo had already taken off. Ranboo looked over to Tom for reassurance, but found none. Instead, Tom just shot him a smile and saluted him.

“Glad you’re paying, big man,” He said before taking off after Tubbo.

Ranboo just shook his head before running to catch up with the other two.

—!—!—!—

They ended up at one of those chain ice cream shops. It wasn’t the best quality, but it had plenty of flavor options, so no one cared that much. It was absolutely freezing inside, and Ranboo shivered slightly, internally wishing he had gotten his sweatshirt back from Tom already, though he figured it would be too awkward to ask for it back now.

He had already gotten his order and sat down while Tubbo still decided. It wasn’t long before Tom slid into the seat across from him, a large cone of strawberry ice cream in his hand.

“I reckon you’d be the type to bite your ice cream, you know,” Tom said, gesturing to Ranboo.

Ranboo paused, registering the words. “I would not. If anyone would, it’d be Tubbo.”

A small smile spread to Tom’s face. “You’re right, he would.” He glanced over at Tubbo, who was taste-testing his fifth ice cream flavor, before his eyes flicked back to the door. The

smile fell. “Say, Ranboo?”

Ranboo raised an eyebrow. “Hm?”

“How paranoid are you?”

He frowned. “What?”

“Don’t look now, there’s a guy across the street from the ice cream shop just standing there. He’s been following us since two blocks from the laser tag place.”

Ranboo’s face fell.

Phil had told him there was a chance of this. They didn’t know Ranboo’s entire past, and even if they did, he was being fostered by Phil, a man wanted dead by many people. He knew it could be dangerous for him to go out sometimes, but this town was supposed to be safe. He had gone out all the time before.

It was... It was okay. It would be fine. Phil hadn’t taught him many spy-related skills, but he *had* taught him how to lose a tail.

“What does he look like?” Ranboo asked.

“Standard person trying to fit in. Baseball cap, jacket. He’s got sunglasses on, too.”

“We should leave,” Ranboo started to stand, but Tom grabbed his wrist, pulling him back down.

“Don’t,” Tom hissed.

Ranboo pulled his hand away. “We can’t just *stay* here, are you crazy?”

Tom rolled his eyes. “You want to leave without Tubbo?”

They waited five whole minutes for Tubbo to finish ordering some monstrosity of flavors and toppings. He barely got a bite in before Ranboo grabbed his hand and practically dragged him out, Tom following close behind.

Neither of them told Tubbo they were being followed, even though they hadn’t discussed it. It was like they had a silent pact about it. It wasn’t that they didn’t want Tubbo to know, they were just worried he would somehow tip off the man that they were aware of him following them. Well, that was if Ranboo didn’t do that himself. Tom would elbow him every time Ranboo’s eyes flickered back to check if they were still being followed.

Ranboo took the lead, though not without some annoyance from Tom. But Ranboo was the only one with a semblance of spy experience- not that anyone knew that- so he was the one who led the group.

They went in loops, around buildings, through parks, and just as randomly as he could in attempts to lose the man. Either Tubbo didn't care, or he was too busy with his ice cream to notice. A walk that usually took ten minutes took thirty-six, but Ranboo was sure they had lost the man, so he didn't mind. They ended up back at Ranboo's house. Tubbo had spent a lot of time there, and was already racing up the stairs by the time Tom took his shoes off.

"You suck at losing a tail, you know that?" Tom asked, tossing one shoe to the side.

Ranboo shot him a glare. "I don't have a lot of experience, believe it or not."

"I could've lost him in ten. Why didn't you let me lead?" Tom glared right back.

Ranboo made a face. "I doubt that, Tom. I really do."

"Well, next time we get followed, I-"

"Hey guys," Tubbo shouted from the top of the stairs, "Whenever you're done fighting over that, can we talk about *why* he was following us?"

The boys were quick to run up the stairs after that, taking refuge in Ranboo's room.

Tubbo made himself at home on Ranboo's bed, and Tom had shouted 'dibs' when he saw Ranboo's desk chair (a gamer chair, according to Tubbo), which left Ranboo sitting cross-legged on the floor.

"It's probably because of Phil," Ranboo said.

"It's because of me," Tubbo said, at the same time.

Tom glanced slowly between the two of them. "One at a time?"

"Phil, my foster dad, is the head of..." Ranboo trailed off, deciding how to put it.

Tubbo rolled his eyes. "Phil's the head of some spy agency. It's pretty cool, actually. But--"

"The head of which agency?" Tom furrowed his eyebrows.

"Okay, Tubbo!" Ranboo shouted, "That's plenty "

“Doesn’t matter. They’re not after you,” Tubbo assured him. “They’re after me.”

Ranboo raised an eyebrow. “Tubbo, why would they be after you?”

“I may or may not have hacked into a government agency.”

A beat.

“Tubbo, you *what?*” Ranboo hadn’t meant to shout, but his voice sort of rose on its own accord. Tom appeared a little less shocked, but just as upset about it.

“Remember Purpled? You met him once or twice. American kid, looks kind of like Tom, goes to my school?” Tubbo prompted. “He went missing a few weeks ago. He’s been involved in some stuff before, so I figured I would check and see if I could find anything.”

“Right... He’s, like, your friend or something?” Tom asked.

Tubbo nodded. “Yeah. He’s pretty cool. But no one knows where he is, so I thought I’d check a few systems to see if anyone... I don’t know, kidnapped him or something. There’s been rumors going around...”

“And whose system did you check in?” Tom asked. There was an almost nervous expression on his face.

“The SMP. Service of... Something something.”

“Tubbo!” Ranboo exclaimed, “Those guys are dangerous! You can’t just do things like that!”

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “I *know* they’re dangerous, that’s why I had to make sure they didn’t have Purpled. Except their stupid blockers kept stopping me. The little bit I did find was all encrypted, anyway.”

Ranboo groaned. “They could have- no, the *did* send someone after you! Tubbo, they could have been trying to kill you. They could-”

Tom cut in, “You might be overreacting a tiny bit. If they wanted to kill you, they wouldn’t have sent someone to do it when you were with other people.”

Ranboo made a face. If only this guy knew the beginning of how spies worked in the real world. He knew that Tom had likely gotten all of his information on spies from movies and TV, maybe even a book or two. It worked different than that in real life, and it was almost inconsiderate of Tom to assume it didn’t.

Of course, Tom had no idea what he was dealing with, so Ranboo couldn’t really blame him.

“Unless they were scouting him out for later,” Ranboo pointed out.

Tom shook his head. “No way. But that’s- I feel like we’re moving really quickly past the whole Tubbo-hacked-a-government-agency thing.”

Tubbo shrugged, feigning innocence. “It’s not that big of a deal. I hack into stuff all the time. This place just had crazy high security. It’s not, like, unheard of.”

Ranboo grimaced before speaking again. “It’s still dangerous. What if that guy’s out there waiting for you?”

“I figured I could stay the night. Phil will be fine with it, he likes me. Plus, he hasn’t met Tom yet.”

“Tubbo, I swear, if this is all an elaborate ploy to ask for a sleepover-”

“It’s not!” Tubbo said quickly, “Although, you know you can’t complain. You love our sleepovers and you know it!”

“Is your dad-”

“He won’t even know I’m gone. What do you say, Tom, sleepover?” Tubbo asked, turning to Tom, who had a shocked look on his face.

“I- uh-” He uncharacteristically stuttered before managing to control himself. “Sure, sounds good. As long as, uh, Phil is okay with it.”

Ranboo nodded. “Phil will just be glad I’ve made another friend. I’ll text him and ask him to pick up pizza on the way home. You two want to run downstairs and start up some video games?”

Tubbo grinned. Without a word, he grabbed Tom’s arm and all but dragged him downstairs. Ranboo could hear the shouts as they argued over what games to play

—!—!—!—

Tom was terrible at video games. It wasn’t his fault, but he clearly had no idea how to play. Ranboo suggested getting a different controller, but Tom refused, saying it would be fine and that he just needed to get better at the controls.

He didn’t get better at the controls. Ranboo was getting a sneaking suspicion that Tom had never played a video game in his life, which just strengthened Ranboo’s theory about him being homeless. Maybe inviting Tom over wasn’t such a bad idea after all. At least then, Ranboo was sure he’d be sleeping in an actual bed. Well, an air mattress, but same difference.

After a few rounds of the game, Phil arrived with two boxes of pizza. Ranboo, Tubbo, and Tom all rushed in as soon as the door opened- not that it was a surprise. They were teenage boys, of course they would be excited for pizza.

“How was laser tag?” Phil asked, reaching into the cupboard to pull down plates for each of them.

“It was great!” Tubbo said before Ranboo could respond. “Tom and I beat Ranboo first try. I swear Tom is a secret genius or something, ‘cause his plan worked right away.”

Ranboo couldn’t help but nod along. “Actually, yeah. He sort of reminds me of Technoblade. Speaking of, is he coming home tonight?”

Phil shrugged. “He’s pulling a late night at-” He had been speaking as he turned, but stopped as his eyes landed on Tom. He was staring at the boy, a mix of grief and confusion washed over his face.

Tom swallowed before putting up a surprisingly real-looking (but definitely fake) smile on his face. “What kind of name is Technoblade?”

“He’s a friend of Phil,” Ranboo explained hesitantly, glancing back and forth between Phil and Tom. “He lives here.”

Tom nodded. “Weird, but okay.” A beat. “He’s not a-” Tom began to ask something, but Phil interrupted him.

“What did you say your name was again, Mate?”

“Tom. Uh, Tom Simmons.” Tom said, finally glancing up at Phil.

“Right, sorry. You just... You look like someone I fostered once.”

Tom’s hand twitched just slightly. Ranboo barely even saw the movement but it was there. “Nah, sorry man, I don’t think so. I’ve only been fostered for a few years.”

Phil gave him a tight smile. “No, no, you’re much younger than him, anyway. Just... Similar faces. He had curly hair, too, though his was brown.”

Tubbo, who didn’t seem to notice the awkwardness of the situation, had grabbed a slice of pizza and tossed it onto his plate, spoke up. “What was his name? Maybe he’s Tom’s long lost brother or something,” He joked.

“His name was Wilbur.”

Tom's eyes went wide as he let out a sudden fit of coughs. Ranboo would have assumed he had swallowed food wrong if he hadn't known Tom had yet to grab food for himself. Ranboo quickly pat him on the back a few times until the coughing subsided.

"Sorry, must've... Breathed wrong," Tom muttered, clearly making up excuses on the spot. No one called him out on it, though.

"Right, right. Well, I'm sure you kids don't want an old man around, so I'll head upstairs to get some work done. And, Ranboo?"

"Hm?" Ranboo hummed, tilting his head.

"Don't stay up too late. Am I taking all three of you to school tomorrow?" Phil raised an eyebrow.

Ranboo shook his head. "Just me and Tubbo. Tom's still not enrolled yet," He shot a glance at Tom, who nodded, "But his fosters are working on it."

Phil nodded. "Sounds good. Goodnight, kids, don't burn down the house while I'm gone." With a wave, Phil left.

The mood lightened considerably once Phil was gone, which was... Odd. Ranboo had always gotten along with Phil, and so had Tubbo, but there seemed to be some strange tension between Phil and Tommy. Maybe it was the fact that Phil was a foster parent?

Ranboo wasn't sure. It wasn't his place to ask, either. Besides, Tubbo and Tom had already gone back to eating pizza, talking about some song they both had been listening to lately. Ranboo slipped into their conversation seamlessly.

The three of them had a slightly odd dynamic. It wasn't bad, just... Different. Maybe that's what happens when someone adopts a random cafe customer into their friend group, but it wasn't exactly like Ranboo had much experience with that. He didn't even work at the cafe. He had no reason to run into Tom.

Tom, who had no legal records to speak of. Tom, who acted as if he had never played a video game before. Tom, who still wasn't enrolled in school, despite him living here for over five weeks at this point.

They were back on the couch now, Tubbo on one end of the couch, Ranboo on the other, Tom in the middle. Tubbo held the remote carelessly as he flicked through the options for the movie. In the background, the microwave whirled and there was the dull sound of popping as the popcorn cooked. Cooked? Ranboo wasn't entirely sure how it worked, but it wasn't all that important.

If Ranboo looked closely, he could see the tiniest portion of the scar tucked behind Tom's ear. Of course, it was mostly covered by his hair, too, which Ranboo was beginning to think may have been bleached. It looks like brown roots were growing in, but he couldn't quite be sure. He was about to ask about it, thinking that maybe dying their hair could be something they could bond over- when Tom's phone went off.

Tom shook his head, quickly standing. He muttered an "I have to take this" before pacing to the edge of the room. Tubbo didn't move his attention from the TV, but Ranboo couldn't help but glance back at Tom.

He was standing a lot straighter now. Usually his posture rivaled a candy cane, but now he could probably balance a book on his head. He was speaking in hushed, annoyed tones. It would be rude to listen in to his private conversation, but Ranboo still found himself straining his ears to listen.

"No, he wants to have a sleepover." A pause, then, "At Ranboo's house. I already told you who he is... No, I did, yeah, after I mentioned the whole Quackity situation."

Tommy made a face. It was somewhere between annoyed and discomforted, though neither emotion seemed too terribly severe.

"No, you're right, it's all a plot to kill me," Tommy said, sarcastically. "You know what you sound like? Mimim-" He stopped himself, rolling his eyes.

And then he frowned heavily.

"He's coming? Like, right now? Well, no, I got some- but I- you're not-" He groaned, not being able to finish his sentence. "Yeah, yeah, okay. Okay." A beat. "*Okay*." He swore under his breath and tucked his phone back into his pocket. "Hey, Tubbo, Ranboob?"

Before Ranboo could correct him on the name, Tubbo perked up. "What's up, Tom?"

"Change of plans, boys. My foster dad's picking me up."

Tubbo frowned. "Aw, do you have to?"

Tom nodded. "Mhm."

"We'll have to take a raincheck, then," Ranboo said, "I'll walk you to the door?"

"I'm not going to get lost walking to your door, Ranboo," Tom muttered, but Ranboo had already gotten to his feet and followed Tom to the door.



He waited until they were in the doorway, Tom sitting on the floor as he struggled to get his shoes back on, and then he spoke.

“Hey, real quick, Tom, I wanted to ask you a question.”

Tom looked up at him. His hands stilled, one shoe only halfway on his foot.

“Where did you get the scar behind your ear?”

#### Chapter End Notes

the plot's going to start picking up fast next chapter and i am so excited for it

# memories

## Chapter Summary

Why was Ranboo with them? Why did they know Karl? Dream had said all the failed patients had been taken care of. Okay, no, Tommy knew how that sounded, and that wasn't what he meant. They weren't dead. They were supposed to be... Well, somewhat like people in a Witness Protection Program. They would be shipped off far away, provided with money, and watched over. Not within walking distance of the SMP.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy was a trained spy, it should *not* be this much of a struggle to answer a simple question. He could blame it on the fact he had just seen Phil freaking Watson of all people, but still, he was supposed to be calm in all situations.

“Birthmark,” Tommy said, just a little bit too fast, “I was born with it.”

Ranboo raised an eyebrow. “Tom...”

“Are you seriously going to tell me that I’m wrong about my own birthmark?” Tommy challenged, making eye-contact with Ranboo.

“I’m not- I-” He sighed, then took a deep breath before continuing. “How much of your life do you really remember?”

Tommy frowned. “What do you mean?”

“What’s your earliest memory?”

“I don’t-” He began, but Ranboo spoke again, which was odd. The guy hated interrupting people.

“Mine is when I was fourteen.”

Tommy stared at him, and he stared right back. After a moment of staring, Tommy spoke up. “What?”

“I can’t- I can’t remember anything before I was fourteen. And even then, it’s hazy. I don’t have a lot of memories before I turned fifteen, really,” Ranboo explained.

Without really thinking, Tommy reached forward. Ranboo didn't so much as flinch when Tommy's hands met Ranboo's face, pulling it to the side so Tommy could get a better view of the spot behind his ear.

He had to push some of the hair out of the way- that must have been why he kept it so long- before he could see it. A small red line curling up at both ends, almost like a parenthesis. It was painfully familiar, and of course it was, because Tommy had one, too. And Ranboo knew about both of them. But that meant-

Woah.

"We need to talk to Phil," Ranboo said.

Tommy had never shaken his head so fast in his life. "No, no, no we do not, actually. I have to-"

"He can help you, Tom." Ranboo spoke a little softer this time, which Tommy was not a fan of. It felt more like pity than anything else. "I know not remembering things is scary, but he can help. He- remember Karl from the cafe? He's in the same position we are."

He knew about Karl Jacobs. He knew about *Karl Jacobs*. No one was supposed to know about that. Why- *how*- did he know about him?

Ranboo continued on as if Tommy wasn't having a mental crisis. "I know it's scary but we can get you help. We call it the Crimson, and it messes with your memory."

Tommy took a deep breath, forcing himself to calm down. Good spies stayed calm under pressure. That's what-

"We think it's caused by-"

"I don't know what you're talking about, big man," Tommy said, casually, "I remember... Well, I guess not everything, but certainly as much as everyone else can." A beat. "I'm sorry that you can't, though. That sounds... That sounds really rough, dude."

Ranboo frowned and furrowed his eyebrows. "Are- are you sure?"

"Positive. Look, I'd ask if you were okay, but I really have to go. Maybe talk to Tubbo about it?" He pulled on his sneaker, not even bothering with the laces. He stood up quickly and smoothed down his sweater.

"Tom, I-"

"I should get going," Tommy interrupted, pulling open the door. "See you around, 'Boo." Before he could get a response, he closed the door behind him. He was halfway down the

driveway when he heard the door open again, but at that point he just rushed into the car waiting for him.

It wasn't Sapnap's car. No, it was probably just one owned by the SMP. It was a sleek black thing with dark tinted windows. If Tommy had been taught a little more about stranger danger (and he wasn't rushing to get away from Ranboo), he probably would have hesitated before getting into the car. But, he didn't, and now he was sitting in the passenger's seat.

Luckily for him, it was just Sapnap, there to pick him up, just as Dream said he would. Tommy let out a loud sigh and leaned back in his seat. Sapnap pressed on the gas, and it wasn't long before they were out of Ranboo's neighborhood.

He should tell Sapnap everything. Starting with the fact that that was *Phil Watson's* house, and ending with the fact that Ranboo was... Well, he was like Tommy, wasn't he?

Tommy ended up not saying any of that. Instead, he plastered a huge grin onto his face and turned to Sapnap.

"So... Karl Jacobs, huh?"

A blush was already spreading to Sapnap's cheeks. It was almost funny. He was a grown man, and just the mention of this guy's name made him go red. "It wasn't like that. I was just checking up on him."

Tommy snorted. "And you brought your fiance along for...?"

"Moral support."

He actually laughed at that. "Mhm. Is that why you were holding his hand?"

"Oh, shut up." Sapnap elbowed him, only slightly swerving the car as he did so.

"Karl called it a date, you know. He seemed very-"

Sapnap tried his best to clap his hand over Tommy's mouth, but only succeeded in swerving the car once again halfway into another lane. Someone's car horn blared loudly, and Tommy burst out laughing.

"You're a terrible getaway driver, did you know that?" He teased once his laughter had finally calmed down.

Sapnap just rolled his eyes. "Good thing I'm not a getaway driver, then. Dream just wanted me to pick you up. I'm more like- okay, a chauffeur isn't *better*, but..." He trailed off with a sigh.

Tommy glanced at him for a moment, then he went to looking out the front window. “Right, about that, why did Dream want me? I was actually getting somewhere in my case.”

Sapnap just shrugged. “He was meeting with someone, said he wanted you to be there, too.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Meeting with who?”

Sapnap shrugged again. “I don’t know, he didn’t tell me.”

“Aren’t you, like, his second in command? Shouldn’t you know this stuff?”

“I’m his second in command, not his *secretary*. Geez, Tommy,” Sapnap teased.

—!—!—!—

Tommy was immediately led into Dream’s office, where he was met by Dream, sitting in his chair, hands folded on top of the desk, and... Some man. He looked a little older than Dream, scruffy brown hair on his head and some impressive sideburns. He wore a tailored suit and was leaning back in his chair, arms crossed over his chest. Neither man stood when he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

“Tommy, have a seat,” Dream gestured to the chairs off at the side of the room. Certainly, he meant for Tommy to drag it over to the side of the desk, but instead he walked over and sat. After a moment of giving Tommy a look, he continued. “Right. Schlatt, this is Tommy.”

The man- Schlatt, apparently, nodded, barely sparing a glance at Tommy. “And you said he’s your first successful patient?”

“All of our patients have been successful, he was just the first who retained his skills afterwards,” Dream explained.

“Mhm,” Schlatt hummed, “And does he remember anything else?”

“Just his name. There... Do seem to be glimpses, but nothing that can’t be brushed off.”

Tommy wasn’t quite sure what they were talking about here. He knew he wasn’t supposed to remember anything from his life before Dream, and he knew it was a good thing that he remembered the training he had gotten beforehand, but he wasn’t sure why they were talking about it here. As far as he knew, the research was supposed to be kept an absolute secret.

Although, Ranboo did seem to know something about it. Or, maybe not Ranboo, but Phil. Of course Phil would know about it. That probably meant Technoblade knew, too. Then why

didn't they save-

Why was Ranboo with them? Why did they know *Karl*? Dream had said all the failed patients had been taken care of. Okay, no, Tommy knew how that sounded, and that wasn't what he meant. They weren't *dead*. They were supposed to be... Well, somewhat like people in a Witness Protection Program. They would be shipped off far away, provided with money, and watched over. Not within walking distance of the SMP.

"Is he damaged?" Schlatt asked suddenly, standing up and walking over to Tommy, who immediately cast his gaze downward and straightened his posture.

"Nothing that would interfere with-" Dream began to say, but Schlatt cut him off.

"Stand up."

It took a moment for Tommy to realize that, oh, he was talking to *him* and not to Dream. Usually, with higher ups, they wouldn't even acknowledge Tommy was there, even if they *were* talking about Tommy in front of him. Slowly, Tommy got to his feet, again, straightening his posture. He clasped his hands behind his back in the way Dream had taught him to.

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen, sir," Tommy responded.

Schlatt reached up suddenly, nearly causing Tommy to flinch, and pushed Tommy's hair back and away from his forehead. "He has burn scars here. Surely that's a little conspicuous?"

Dream cleared his throat. He was standing next to Schlatt, now. "Just small ones from his specific treatment. They aren't prominent on our newest patients."

"You've done good work here, Dream. I think my team would be more than happy to begin implementing this into our own training."

"Oh, you must have misunderstood," Dream said quickly, "We would provide the soldiers to you. The SMP doesn't give out that sort of classified information."

Schlatt raised an eyebrow. "Not even for an old friend?"

Dream had a tight-lipped smile on his face. "I'm afraid not. Tell you what, Schlatt, I have another appointment I need to get to, but you can talk to my receptionist about scheduling another meeting, okay? I'll even give you a whole list of agents to choose from."

There was a moment where Tommy genuinely thought Schlatt was going to disagree. He thought Schlatt might grab him by the shoulders and force him to go... Wherever? Tommy wasn't entirely sure what this whole meeting was about.

But that didn't happen. Schlatt just nodded and walked to the door.

"I'll talk to your receptionist, then. Oh, and Tommy?" He glanced back.

Tommy didn't speak, but he did look up at Schlatt.

"I'd be careful when walking around the city. You never know who's watching, you know?" With that, he slipped out the door, closing it behind him.

It took Tommy a moment to realize what Schlatt was talking about, and even then, he wasn't entirely positive. Though it was the only reasonable answer- It wasn't Ranboo who had someone following him that night, it was Tommy. But... Why?

Dream looked confused, but quickly shook it off. "What a creep. Sorry about interrupting your playdate, by the way, but this was supposed to be more important."

Tommy just nodded slowly, still confused by the entire situation.

"The nerve of that guy. I told him- we can give him *new* agents, but he can't take any of our own. And what does he ask for?" Dream was more ranting to himself at this point. "He asks for you. I just- I'm going to kill that man one day, I swear."

Tommy almost agreed, but stopped himself before he did. He almost forgot- he had questions for Dream. "Actually- Dream? You said the failed patients go into protection." There was accusation in his voice. He hadn't meant for it to come out so strongly, but it wasn't like he didn't feel it.

"What are you talking about?" Dream looked confused, and Tommy wasn't sure whether or not it was an act.

"You said all the failed patients go into protection," He repeated, "You said they go far away where they're safe."

A beat. "They do."

"Then why," Tommy took a step towards Dream, standing up straight as he could, "Did I see Karl Jacobs in the cafe last week?"

Dream's expression shifted into that of concern. "Oh, Tommy... You're not hallucinating again, are you?"

Tommy shot a glare at him. "No, I'm not."

"Tom-"

“Ranboo saw him too, and Sapnap confirmed it. I’m not stupid, Dream,” He sneered.

“If Karl decided to move back here, that’s none of my business,” Dream replied coolly.

Tommy just rolled his eyes. “I’m not stupid, Dream. You lied to me.”

“What makes you think you even deserve to know everything? You’re barely an agent, Tommy.” Dream crossed his arms. He wasn’t glaring at Tommy, more just... Looking at him reprimandingly. Was that a word? Probably not.

Tommy crossed his arms right back. “Because this is a simple thing, Dream. If- if you lied about this, what else have you lied about?”

Lots of things. Tommy *knew* he lied about lots of things. He lied to Tommy about his past, about his friends, about how dangerous this job was.

But Tommy had lied right back to him. As far as Dream knew, Tommy had no recollection of his life before joining the SMP. As far as Dream knew, Tommy didn’t even know what the process of ‘training’ was. Of course, Tommy didn’t remember all of it, but he knew enough. He knew it was a barely-legal form of torture.

He knew he wasn’t allowed to leave the SMP. He pretended he wanted to stay, but he knew he didn’t have a choice either way.

“Tommy,” Dream shook his head, “I’m not going to deal with this right now. Head back to your room, I’ll-”

“I’m not stupid, Dream. You owe me the truth.”

“I don’t owe you anything, Tommy. You’re barely even an agent, you know. You’re lucky I even keep-“

“You hurt Ranboo. You put him through what you put me through, too, didn’t you?” He didn’t really want to out Ranboo, but the words just sort of came out. He doubted Dream would do anything about it, anyway.

Dream rolled his eyes. “You met him less than a month ago. Even if I *did* do something to him, it shouldn’t matter to you.”

“And what about Wilbur?”

It was quiet enough to hear a pin drop. Maybe not a pin, but Tommy could hear the rumbling of the heater in the background. He could hear the loud laughter of Sapnap a few doors down.



When Dream didn't reply, Tommy kept speaking, voice rising in volume with his anger. "You killed him- and don't even pretend you didn't, I *know* you did."

"Tommy," Dream said, voice warning, but Tommy didn't care.

"You killed my brother."

Dream shook his head. "I didn't kill him. How was I supposed to know that building was going to explode?"

"You sent him in there to *die*, Dream!" Tommy exclaimed.

Dream's tone shifted suddenly, out of the defensive and into something darker. He shook his head. "He was expendable anyway. It wasn't like his death mattered, really."

Tommy took in a small gasp of air. "What?"

"He was new to the company, you know. I know he had ties with Phil. If we had to lose anyone, it might as well have been him." Dream said it calmly, as if he was just talking about the weather. Tommy despised it, but he couldn't quite get his voice to work enough to come up with something to say back.

"You... You killed him."

We all have to make sacrifices, Tommy."

Tommy bit his lip, looking to the floor. "And you're not even sorry about it?" It was less of a question and more wanting confirmation.

"Sacrifices, Tommy." Dream reminded him. "Now," Dream moved forward until he was right in front of Tommy, carefully placing a heavy hand on his shoulder.

Oh, Tommy had messed up, hadn't he?

Here's the thing about EEG- or the Crimson, or whatever people wanted to call it- it erased memories. Memories of people's families, their homes, their lives before- it was all gone. The only thing that remained would be muscle memory- the ability to use weapons or skills like picking locks.

Tommy shouldn't be able to recall a thing before the age of thirteen. He shouldn't remember Wilbur or Phil or Technoblade, he shouldn't remember the Syndicate, he shouldn't remember foster care. But he did. He remembered all of it. When Dream had originally asked him about it, he had lied in an attempt to stay alive, and it worked pretty well.

Now, it was all coming back to bite him.

“Last I checked, you didn’t remember Wilbur. Care to explain?” It was funny, from this angle, Dream seemed to tower over him, even if they didn’t actually have that big of a height difference.

Tommy shrunk back just slightly under his gaze, but forced himself to make eye-contact with Dream. He was a spy, after all. What kind of spy would he be if he couldn’t lie? “I keep having dreams about him. I didn’t tell you ‘cause I figured you’d be upset.”

A beat, then, “How much do you remember?”

Tommy paused, just for a moment. Luckily for him, he didn’t have to make anything up, he just had to list a few things. “His name’s Wilbur Soot. He’s my brother, and he’s- he’s got curly brown hair like I do.”

“How old would he be?”

“Twenty-four,” Tommy answered a bit too quickly, but couldn’t help himself. He celebrated Wilbur’s birthday quietly by himself each year, of course he knew how old he was.

Another uncomfortable moment of silence. Then, Dream let go of Tommy’s shoulder, dropping his arm back to his side. “It’s late, kid, you should head to bed. We can talk more in the morning.”

Tommy’s hand twitched just slightly. “Are you sure, sir?” He made sure to use the honorific, as if it would get him on Dream’s good side.

“Yeah, I am. Hey, do me a favor- send Sapnap in on your way out, okay?”

“Yes, sir.” Tommy nodded. He was very much willing to leave, quickly slipping out the door of Dream’s office.

There was Sapnap, sitting in the chair at the receptionist desk. He was texting someone on his phone, spinning in his chair as he did so. He stopped mid-spin upon seeing Tommy, and went so far as to put the phone in his pocket.

“You okay, Tommy?” Sapnap asked, concern creeping into his voice.

“I’m fine. Dream wants to talk to you,” Tommy gestured with his head to the door.

Sapnap sighed and stood. “And he sent you to tell me? Did you get downgraded to secretary?” He joked. Tommy just rolled his eyes as Sapnap walked through the door, shutting it behind him.

Tommy considered staying behind and trying to listen in to their conversation, but decided not to. Besides, the door was thick, so it wasn't like he'd be able to hear much, anyway. Not to mention, there was a security camera down the hallway that would most certainly record him in the act to get him in trouble later.

So, he headed back to his room. It was... Honestly disappointing, having to leave Tubbo and Ranboo for that. He- wait, no, no, he didn't disappointed. Tubbo was just his target, and Ranboo was just... Ranboo was Ranboo. An enigma, of sorts, but also just a weirdo that Tommy needed to research more of.

Maybe tomorrow he'd go back to the cafe. Or- oh! He could bring Ranboo's sweater back to him. Yeah, yeah, and then he'd have a chance to see Ranboo and see how much he knew about the whole... Crimson situation. Yeah, that's what the boy had called it.

## Chapter End Notes

apologies for any formatting issues/grammar/whatever. i couldn't convince myself to edit this as well as i normally do

anyway, sorry for the long time without updating. i'm not promising a consistent upload schedule, but i'm trying. plot is advancing and it's going to go faster and faster as we move on

## **dream interlude**

### Chapter Summary

“He remembers Will. And he found out about Karl and... Some other kid. Goes by Ranboo, apparently, so I don’t know who he was before. I need you to run Tommy through the program again,” Dream’s voice fell into a scary kind of calm, one that was masking anger. Why he would mask anger after he already had an outburst was hard to say.

“Dream!” Sapnap’s voice rose, sounded almost offended, “You’re being irrational.”

“I’m being completely rational. We already know the EEG works-”

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream paced back and forth in his office for a few minutes while Sapnap sat on the chair across the room. Neither said a word for a long time.

“So... Is there a reason you wanted me here?” Sapnap finally asked, looking up at Dream.

“He’s been lying for months, Sapnap,” Dream snapped, anger heavy in his voice.

“Are you sure? Maybe he was-” Sapnap tried to reason, but it was no use.

“He was lying to my face. I’m not dealing with this blatant disobedience.”

Sapnap sighed loudly, probably thinking through what to say next. “He’s a teenager, Dream. Disobedience is kind of their whole thing.”

“He’s a soldier. He’s been trained, he knows better- doesn’t matter. What matters is that the EEG didn’t work,” Dream snapped again. He wasn’t *that* angry, but he was angry enough.

“But I thought-”

“He remembers Will. And he found out about Karl and... Some other kid. Goes by Ranboo, apparently, so I don’t know who he was before. I need you to run Tommy through the program again,” Dream’s voice fell into a scary kind of calm, one that was masking anger. Why he would mask anger after he already had an outburst was hard to say.

“Dream!” Sapnap’s voice rose, sounded almost offended, “You’re being irrational.”

“I’m being completely rational. We already know the EEG *works*-”

“We don’t, actually. Tommy was our success story, if it didn’t get rid of his memories, then-”

“Then it’ll get rid of them the second time.” Dream grabbed Sapnap by the arms, nails digging into the skin rather painfully. “We have to.”

Sapnap had stepped backwards at this point, pulling out of Dream’s grip. “We don’t *have* to. If it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work.”

Dream would have shaken his head wildly at this point. “If it doesn’t work, then what’s stopping him from telling everyone? We would go down for this, Sapnap. Now, tell me, do you *want* to go to prison?”

An awkward moment of silence. “No...”

“He remembers Wilbur, Sapnap. You really think he doesn’t hold that against us?” Dream practically snarled.

“He doesn’t hate us, if that’s what you’re implying. Besides, he hasn’t told anyone yet,” Sapnap replied coolly.

Dream groaned. “He knows everything, Sap. One wrong move and he takes that information and runs. If he gets it to a publisher we’re done for, you know that, right?”

Another moment of silence, then Sapnap spoke. “I know. I know, I know. If the public finds out, they really won’t be happy... You really think they’d send us to prison, though?”

“In a heartbeat. Which is why we have to run him through EEG again.”

Sapnap faltered. “We don’t know what the effects would be. Dream, it’s not safe.”

“I wasn’t asking. And while you’re at it, you need to find whoever he was running around with, too. Search for a Ranboo- probably a Ranboo Doe, considering he doesn’t even remember his real name.”

There was a brief moment of silence as Sapnap pondered what Dream was saying. Then his mouth twisted to a frown.

“Find him how, Dream?”

“Track him down, take him in for questioning. Tommy made it sound like this kid knows about the EEG, which could be... Problematic.”

Sapnap most certainly rolled his eyes. “And when we’re done questioning him?”

“Well... We wouldn’t want anyone finding out about the project, would we?” Dream asked it as if they both knew the answer. They probably did.

“Are you sure, Dream? That feels a little... Much.” There was just a hint of worry in his voice.

“I’m sure.”

Another loud sigh from Sapnap. “Okay, okay. Just... Can it wait until tomorrow? It’s late, and I’ll have to talk to George about scheduling an EEG, and-”

“That’s fine, that’s fine. Take Tommy in the morning, and I’m assuming you’ll be able to find the other kid by the weekend, right?” Dream asked.

“Yeah, yeah, of course,” Sapnap replied.

“Alright, that works. That’s... All I needed you for. Thanks, Sapnap.”

Sapnap just nodded to that. Getting Tommy would be easy, especially considering he trusted everyone around him. As for finding the other kid... It would be more difficult, but not too bad. Sapnap would contact the guy who tracked down missing persons and see if he could find anything, which he almost definitely could, considering the kid was... Well, a kid. He didn’t know he should be in hiding.

Sapnap walked out of the room, closing the door behind him and leaving Dream alone. Dream let out a sigh, burying his head in his hands. He could make this work. He would have to.

## Chapter End Notes

veeery short chapter for today, longer chapter coming tomorrow or wednesday :)

# Red

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ranboo considered himself a pretty independent person, at least, compared to where he was when Phil first took him in. He used to have to ask for help all the time, asking Phil for help with this or that. Now that he was older, though, he was a lot more independent.

Not independent enough, though, because apparently he still needed Phil's help. It wasn't a negative thing, he guessed, it just... He really thought he could deal with it on his own. He couldn't. Not when Tom was definitely a survivor of Crimson, and, more importantly, probably the person Ranboo had been sent to research. It was ironic, really, he spent all that time looking through files, and it turned out, the person was right in front of him the whole time.

When Phil dropped him and Tubbo off for school the morning after the sleepover, when Tubbo rushed off to get to class on time, Ranboo stayed behind.

"You alright, mate?" Phil asked.

Ranboo let out a deep sigh. "I'm fine. I'm fine, Phil, yeah. I just- I think- I need to tell you something."

Phil stared at him for a long moment, eyes slowly widening. "Tell me you didn't get a girl pregnant."

"No!" Ranboo shouted, frantically shaking his head. "No, no. Uh... You know my friend Tom?"

Phil nodded.

"I think he's Red."

A beat.

"You think he's *what*?" Phil turned to stare at him with wide eyes.

"Tom's a blond, tall, young adult male. He matches the description perfectly, and... He has the same scar as me. It's- even if he's not Red, he's dealt with Crimson," Ranboo explained, albeit a little awkwardly.

Phil stared at him for a long time. “How long have you thought that?”

Ranboo sighed. “Since the day I gave you the list of possible suspects. I just- I wanted to be sure it was really him, and then I looked him up, and...” He trailed off, casting his gaze out the car window.

“And..?” Phil prompted.

“He doesn’t exist. There’s no record of him anywhere, not even in the foster system.”

“What about alternate-”

“Already checked alternate spellings, too. There aren’t any. He just- he doesn’t exist, Phil.”

Phil sighed and rubbed his eyes. “You think... You really think he’s Red?”

“I do, yeah.”

A beat, then, “I’ll talk to Technoblade about it and see what we can do. Thank you for telling me.”

Ranboo nodded, finally undoing his seatbelt and pushing open the door.

“Oh, do you want a ride home from school today?”

“I’ll just take the bus back, it’s not a big deal.”

It wasn’t a big deal. After school was over, he made it to the bus stop and took it to the stop nearest his home. It was only a ten minute walk, and though the weather was cooler than usual, he was wearing a new sweatshirt that easily blocked the cold wind.

It was a ten minute walk. He already had his keys in his hand, and the house was in sight. So that left the question- why had the same car passed him twice now? It was black with tinted windows, and it reminded him of the one that had picked Tom up last night, though he couldn’t tell if it was the same one or not. It had been too dark to tell the night before.

Still, it gave him the creeps, so he picked up his pace until he made it to his house, fumbling with the keys for just a moment before he managed to fit them into the lock. He turned the keys, then the door, and pushed it open. Once inside (and the door locked. He had double checked, just in case), he slipped his shoes off and headed to his room.

He told Phil about Red. He had actually done it. That was *good*. As much as Ranboo had wanted to keep it to himself, he knew in the long run, it wouldn’t go well, so it was better to get it off his chest now rather than later.



And, even if Tom wasn't actually Red, he was definitely a Crimson survivor, which meant Phil should know about it anyway. Although, in Ranboo's experience, most Crimson survivors (meaning just Karl and himself) didn't shy away from learning information about it. It probably had to do with the fact that they remembered so little about their past lives, that learning information like this helped make up for it.

But, yeah, no matter what, it was good for Phil to know.

Ranboo didn't see Tom that day. Or the next, or the next. He had asked Tubbo about it, but Tubbo said that he hadn't been to the cafe, either.

"It's probably fine, 'Boo," Tubbo had assured him, "He probably just got embarrassed that he didn't get to stay at the sleepover. I bet he'll be back soon."

Ranboo wasn't quite convinced. "Are you sure? What if- what if his foster parents sent him back or something?" Or something happened with the SMP? He knew they were dangerous, there was a chance they were just as dangerous to their own employees.

"At least give it a few days." Tubbo rolled his eyes.

"In my defense, last time he went missing, he had been mugged," Ranboo pointed out.

Tubbo seemed to actually consider that for a moment, thinking. "Huh... Hey, maybe I should hack into the foster company's files and find his address."

"Tubbo, that's creepy-" Ranboo began, but Tubbo's face lit up.

"Maybe *I* could hack into the foster files. I bet I could-"

"Tubbo!" Ranboo chided, shaking his head. "You're right, you're right. I'm sure he's fine."

Tubbo flashed him a smile. "That's what I thought, big man. Now, come on, you promised you'd help me with French homework."

—!—!—!—

He had another night terror that night. He would blame it on the stress of having a missing friend who might be a spy, but the reason didn't matter.

Ranboo wasn't at the metal table. No, he was in a small room with metal walls and a concrete floor. He imagined it would be cold, but he couldn't quite feel it. The room was dark aside from a small screen in front of him, attached up rather high on the wall, probably to keep people from reaching it.

But Ranboo was tall, so he reached his hand up and- oh, no, he didn't. His hands were cuffed together behind his back, a chain linked them to the wall behind him. He would... Need to figure that out later. For now, however, he just turned his attention back to the screen, which he was beginning to realize was just a television mounted to the wall.

It was the closeup of the bottom of a man's face. He had a sharp jawline and was incredibly clean-shaven, not even a bit of stubble on his chin. His teeth were gleaming white and just a little bit sharp. He looked on the verge of being inhuman, though it was hard to tell with such little information on him.

His mouth was moving, just slightly exaggerated compared to the words he was speaking. Oh, the words he was speaking... What was he saying? He could definitely hear a deep timbre of his voice, but Ranboo couldn't quite make out the words. He may be a polyglot, but he had never quite figured out how to lip read.

It didn't matter, though, because pretty soon, he could understand the words. They were echoey, as if the man speaking was in a large empty room, or had some sort of reverb on his microphone.

"You are a loyal member of the SMP. You will obey," it said.

Ranboo looked up at the screen and blinked slowly.

"You are a loyal member of the SMP," it said again, "You will obey."

The man repeated himself, over and over again. Ranboo couldn't tell if the video was looped or not. There seemed to be subtle things that changed every time, but that could have easily just been Ranboo's eyes playing tricks on him.

But then the person shifted, and it wasn't a man talking. It was someone younger, slightly paler, a hint of blonde hair just barely brushing into the top of the screen. Tiny scars were all over his face, just barely noticeable. His jawline wasn't as sharp as the man's, but he did have a very prominent cleft chin.

His voice was higher, too. Oh, Ranboo knew this person.

"You are a loyal member of the SMP. You will obey." His voice was slightly higher than Ranboo remembered, but maybe he was younger, or maybe his mind was playing tricks on him.

That was-

Ranboo's eyes flicked open and he sat straight up in bed. *His own* bed in his own room. He wasn't locked in some weird television room anymore, which he was relieved about.

However, he did have several questions. Of course, there was a good chance that his brain had made up seeing Tom in his memories. He probably had just been thinking about him before he fell asleep. But the room itself? No, that wasn't something he could just make up. That was a new room.

There was a book he kept by his bedside. A dream journal, of sorts, but only for dreams about his past. He called it his 'memory book', despite how inaccurate it most likely was. Ranboo grabbed the book and scribbled the main descriptors into the book- the size and materials of the room, the television, and the words said.

A glance at the clock confirmed it was only two in the morning, which meant he should really go back to bed, but he wasn't quite ready to do so yet. He decided to go down and get a drink of water first, probably to mull over his dream while he did so.

He stopped halfway down the staircase, surprised to see the kitchen light on. More surprised to hear the voices of Technoblade and Phil, speaking in hushed whispers with volume quickly rising in annoyance.

"I said *no*, Technoblade." Phil sounded like he was repeating this for the hundredth time. Maybe he was.

Technoblade groaned. "He's our best chance, Phil."

"He's not trained in that field. He--"

"I'll train him."

A beat.

"You will *not* train that kid to be a spy. He doesn't need to live that life!" Phil was getting louder now.

"He clearly already *was* a spy, it's not that big of a deal."

"Not- not that big a deal?"

Technoblade let out an exasperated sigh. "Philza--"

"Don't you *dare* call me that," Phil snapped.

“Philza,” Technoblade repeated, more firmly this time.

“Technoblade, as your superior-“

“Philza Minecraft, bravest man I’ve ever met,” Techno said. The words were gibberish, but the man sounded dead serious. “I know you’re scared for him, but it’s our best hope to find out what happened to them.”

When Phil replied next, he was much more subdued. “He could get hurt.”

“He’s a strong kid.”

“So was Wilbur, but--“ Phil’s voice cracked. He didn’t finish the sentence.

“We’ll be there to protect him this time.”

Phil let out a sigh. Ranboo could imagine him running a hand through his hair. “You’ll have to train him.”

“Of course.”

“What do we tell him?”

It was at that point Ranboo took a step back, managing to step on the one creaky stair on the whole staircase. The house went silent. Ranboo quickly clapped a hand over his mouth to quiet his own breathing. It wasn’t that he was doing anything wrong, but he didn’t want Phil and Techno to think he was intruding on their conversation.

Most likely, only a few seconds passed by, but it felt like hours before Techno chuckled, as if their entire conversation had been lighthearted banter.

“We tell him that his weird friend is a spy, and then we ask him to help spy for us,” Techno said. It was deadpan, but it must have been a joke. It had to be a joke, right?

“I... I’ll talk to him tomorrow.”

“Phil-”

“I will,” Phil insisted, “I swear I’ll do it tomorrow. Besides, it’s too late, anyway. He’s asleep.”

Techno just sighed. “Tomorrow, then. Invite him into your office and give him the news.”

“Okay, okay, I will.” Phil replied. They were quiet for a moment, then Phil asked, “Are you going to bed?”

“Yeah. You can stay up worrying all night if you want, but *I* need sleep.” The floorboards of the house creaked under Technoblade’s feet as he took strides further and further from Phil and closer to Ranboo. “You should get some sleep, too.”

“Yeah, Tech, I will.”

Ranboo dashed up the stairs before he could get caught, closing his bedroom door silently behind him.

## Chapter End Notes

it's been a minute, huh?

# death sentence

## Chapter Notes

fingers crossed the formatting works as I'm updating this on my phone today

Tommy's first hint of something being wrong was when Dream greeted him with a smile the morning after Tommy had admitted he remembered Wilbur. Dream was a lot of things- cruel, smart, controlling, but happy? He wasn't a very happy man.

But Dream had waved him off and assured him that he just wanted to let Tommy know that he didn't have to do the mission report for his case on Tubbo. That in itself was odd- usually, even with dropped cases like this one, Dream would always make Tommy do mission reports.

He should have been more on guard. This was something unusual, and Tommy knew it, but he had honestly been too busy mentally celebrating not having to write a report that he didn't even think about *why* Dream didn't want him to write it. He always hated reports- the words tended to get jumbled up when he tried writing them on paper, and though he asked Dream to allow him to voice record them instead, Dream told him he rambled too much and they had to be done on paper.

Maybe Dream was just being nice. Was that too optimistic of Tommy to think? Almost certainly, yes, but he thought it nonetheless.

His second hint- or, rather, red flag, was when Sapnap greeted him. It was mid-morning at that point, and Tommy had only left his room in search of someone to annoy. Funny enough, he had been looking for Sapnap, but it seemed Sapnap had been looking for him, too.

"Hey, Tommy, I was just trying to find you. Thought you'd be in your room," Sapnap laughed a little despite nothing he said being funny.

Tommy rolled his eyes. "I don't spend *all* day in my room, Sap'. I'm not *George*."

Sapnap snorted. "Sure, sure. What are you up to, then?"

"Oh, you know me," Tommy rocked back and forth on his heels, "Committing crimes, seducing women, the usual."

“Mhm.” Sapnap nodded sagely, playing into Tommy’s bit. That was nice of him. Honestly, Dream never indulged him like this.

“I have, I really have. Women love me.”

Sapnap laughed. “Who’s the last woman you’ve even talked to?”

A beat. “Does Ranboo count?”

That made Sapnap laugh harder. So much so that he had to clap a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. Okay, come on, Tommy knew he was funny, but it wasn’t *that* funny.

Tommy waited awkwardly until Sapnap pulled himself back together.

“Hey, speaking of Ranboo, remind me how you two met?” Sapnap’s hand hadn’t left Tommy’s shoulder, but he used it to spin Tommy in a way where, instead of standing face-to-face, they stood side-to-side. Sapnap began walking, and Tommy followed.

“Friend of Tubbo’s. Tubbo works at the coffee shop. Dream made me do a mission on him, you know how it is.” He shrugged.

“Mhm,” Sapnap said, “And now, what, you’re friends with him too?”

Spies weren’t allowed to have friends. Sapnap knew this. Tommy knew this. “Not really, no, just acquaintances. He was just part of the mission, you get how it is.”

That wasn’t entirely true. Although Tommy wasn’t the biggest fan of Ranboo, he really wasn’t a bad guy, and... Well, Ranboo was a weirdo. He was being fostered by Phil and had some weird path that almost certainly intertwined with Tommy’s in some concerning ways. He knew about the EEG, which meant... Well, it meant a lot that Tommy didn’t want to think about.

Yeah, yeah. Ranboo was a lot of things. But he wasn’t Tommy’s *friend*.

“Yeah, of course.”

They were still walking, now going down hallways that Tommy didn’t recognize. They were probably heading towards the archives that Tommy never went to. It was always somehow both cold and stuffy down there, so he did his best to avoid them.

“You went to his house last night, didn’t you?” Sapnap glanced over at him, raising an eyebrow.

“Uh, yeah, I guess so,” Tommy responded.

Sapnap nodded at that. “You meet his family?”

Tommy stopped just for a second, turning to face Sapnap. “You’re asking me a lot of weird questions, big guy. He’s seventeen, you’re kind of sounding like a wrongun’ right now.”

Sapnap laughed. “I swear, I don’t mean to. Dream was just asking me some questions I didn’t have answers to, I was wondering if you did.”

Tommy grimaced. Why was Dream asking questions about Ranboo?

Scratch that. He knew exactly why Dream was asking questions about Ranboo. Ranboo had been through EEG. Dream and Ranboo probably knew each other at some point, in one way or another. Although Ranboo had said he had lived with Phil for... How long, now? It had to have been since before Tommy even met Dream, which would have been... Three years? Four? Although the thought of a thirteen year-old Ranboo going through that was concerning to say the least.

He pushed that thought down. It didn’t matter. Ranboo wasn’t his friend. Tommy was just a spy.

“Well, as much as I like to say I know everything, I will admit that sometimes I don’t.”

Tommy let out a dramatic sigh.

Sapnap laughed once again, though it was more a chuckle this time. “Fair enough, kid.”

They were at a door now. Large and metal. Sapnap had to unlock it with a keycard, which Tommy took note of.

Keycards were used throughout the building, and you had to have special access to get to most areas. Tommy had a keycard that let him have just a little more access than an intern. But Sapnap was the deputy director of the SMP, which meant he had access to everything.

Tommy would have wondered if this was something high-security, but he didn’t need to. The door swung open and he was met with a sickeningly familiar hallway.

Tommy was ten when he met Dream. He was Wilbur’s new boss, and that was just about all Tommy knew. He thought Dream was a creep, a ‘wrongun’ as he often liked to say. Dream took some interest in him, but Wilbur always did his best to steer the man away the best he could. Tommy really didn’t interact with Dream until, well...

Tommy was fourteen when his brother died. He was fourteen when he went to confront Dream. He was fourteen when Dream opened the door and he saw that hallway for the first time.



A concrete floor with flickering fluorescent bulbs above. Walls seeming to get smaller and smaller the further in you went, slowly pressing you in tighter and tighter. It was borderline claustrophobic, or maybe that was just the panic kicking in.

The last time Tommy had been in that hallway, he had been dragged kicking and screaming, begging them to let him go. The last time, he had been tied to a chair. The last time—

Sapnap's hand was on his shoulder.

"Sapnap," Tommy mumbled, glancing back at the man. His heart was starting to beat faster and faster, panic rising in his chest.

Sapnap sighed. "Come on, Tommy, don't make this more difficult than it has to be."

"Sapnap, come on, man." His words came out faster now, more panicked.

"You'll be fine, I promise. It won't even hurt."

His breaths were coming in quicker, more shallow. He needed to run. He couldn't run. Sapnap's hand was still on his shoulder.

"You don't--" Tommy began, only to be cut off as Sapnap shoved him forward and into the hallway.

He focused on the sounds his shoes made as they walked along the concrete. It was more a shuffling sound than anything else, occasionally a quiet scraping.

Two left turns, one right, another left. Sapnap brought him into a small room with a decent amount of computer screens. He gestured to a small office chair, one that looked almost broken, clearly wanting Tommy to sit in it. Tommy didn't sit, instead crossing his arms and fixing a glare on Sapnap.

Sapnap, who had already turned his attention to the computer screens. He seemed to be logging in to... Something. Tommy couldn't tell what. Didn't particularly care, either.

"Sit, Tommy, this'll take a little bit," He instructed.

Tommy still didn't sit. "What are you doing?"

Sapnap glanced back at him, a debate in his eyes. He probably hadn't decided whether or not he wanted to tell Tommy, but eventually, he did. "In logging in your info."

"What info?"

“Your case file from, uh, last time you went through EEG.”

Tommy took in a sharp breath.

“It won’t hurt, you know. You won’t feel a thing. It’s to help you, I promise.”

That was a cold-hearted lie. They both knew it. They went silent after that. Tommy watched as Sapnap navigated through a few more pages of case files. Some girl, some guy, some-- Ranboo? It wasn’t quite right, though. He looked much younger, and his hair was a mix of brown and white, but it was definitely him. Sapnap paused on that file, reading over it for a solid minute, until Tommy spoke.

“What do you want with Ranboo?”

Sapnap jumped, turning back to face Tommy. “I don’t want anything with--“

“You might as well tell me. I’m going to forget it all soon anyways, right?”

He let out a sigh. “Dream wants to question him, find out what he knows.”

Tommy’s heart dropped. “Is it because I told Dream about him?”

Sapnap grimaced, which was answer enough.

“When?”

“Huh?”

“When are they questioning him?” Tommy prompted.

“Tommy--“

“Again, I’m trapped. You lose nothing by telling me.”

A beat of silence, then, “Within the week. Dream wants it done sooner rather than later.”

Tommy hummed in response. This was... Bad. Really bad. He was sentenced to lose his memory, Ranboo had maybe a few days left before they did who-knows-what to him after questioning. And the worst part was there was nothing Tommy could do to stop it.

Well...

Sapnap had turned back to the computer, typing in a few more words. It wouldn’t be long before he finished whatever he was doing. Tommy didn’t have long.

It’s difficult to pick up an office chair and raise it up, nearly over your head. It’s even more difficult to do it quietly.

Tommy wasn't the strongest, even with all his training, so it was no surprise that his arms shook as he held the chair up. He did it as silently as he could. Silently enough that Sapnap didn't turn around, anyway.

So, Tommy stepped forward. One foot in front of the other. He swung the chair back just slightly, to give him more momentum on the forward swing.

The chair crashed against Sapnap's head. It made a sickening crack as it connected, twisting Sapnap's neck in the opposite direction.

The chair clattered down to the floor loudly.

The room went silent.

Several terrible seconds went by as Tommy stood still, unsure of what to do. Sapnap was on the ground. The chair was on the ground. Sapnap wasn't moving.

Carefully, Tommy crouched down next to the man, pressing two fingers against his neck to check for a pulse.

Tommy's heart sped up a little more as-

Oh, no, there it was. A slow, steady heartbeat. Tommy let out a sigh of relief. He grabbed Sapnap's phone and keycard before standing up to his full height again

He was alive. He was out of (immediate) danger. There were only two more things to do.

Get out, and-

Well, getting out was the most important thing. Everything else would come after that.

## End Notes

I don't see enough allium duo fics on this site and I'm here to change that

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